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314 S. Front Street • Historic Downtown • $999,000

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2126 Deer Island • Landfall • $834,000

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812 Shell Point Place • Landfall • $1,175,000

The most spectacular sunsets over water in Landfall are to be found at Shell Point Place overlooking the title estuary Howe Creek. The high bluff cul-des-sac location is out of the flood plain, wooded with deciduous hardwoods and evergreens and is the perfect spot to watch the herons and osprey do their magic!

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July 2019

Features

53 Pulling Up the Wild Blackberry Bushes
Poetry by Ashley Memory

54 Tree People
By Virginia Holman
The 40-year journey to protect North Carolina's ancient cypress forest

60 The World According To Haji P
By Kevin Maurer
The gifted artist and rapper who is to make your next 30 seconds happy

64 Before and After
By William Irvine
A summer house at Wrightsville Beach overlooking Banks Channel gets a stylish makeover from designer Liz Carroll

69 Almanac
By Ash Alder

Cover: Photograph by Charlie Peek
This Page: Photograph by Andrew Sherman

Departments

18 Simple Life
By Jim Dodson

22 SaltWorks

25 Omnivorous Reader
By Stephen E. Smith

31 Drinking With Writers
By Wiley Cash

37 The Conversation
By Dana Sachs

41 Lord Spencer Speaks

45 SaltyWords
By Billy Hirschen

49 Birdwatch
By Susan Campbell

71 Calendar

75 Port City People

79 Accidental Astrologer
By Astrid Stellanova

80 True South
By Susan S. Kelly

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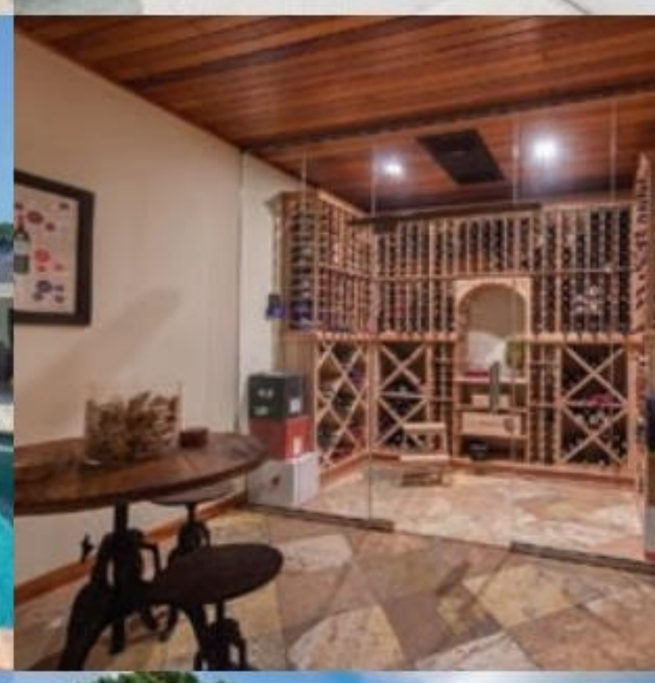

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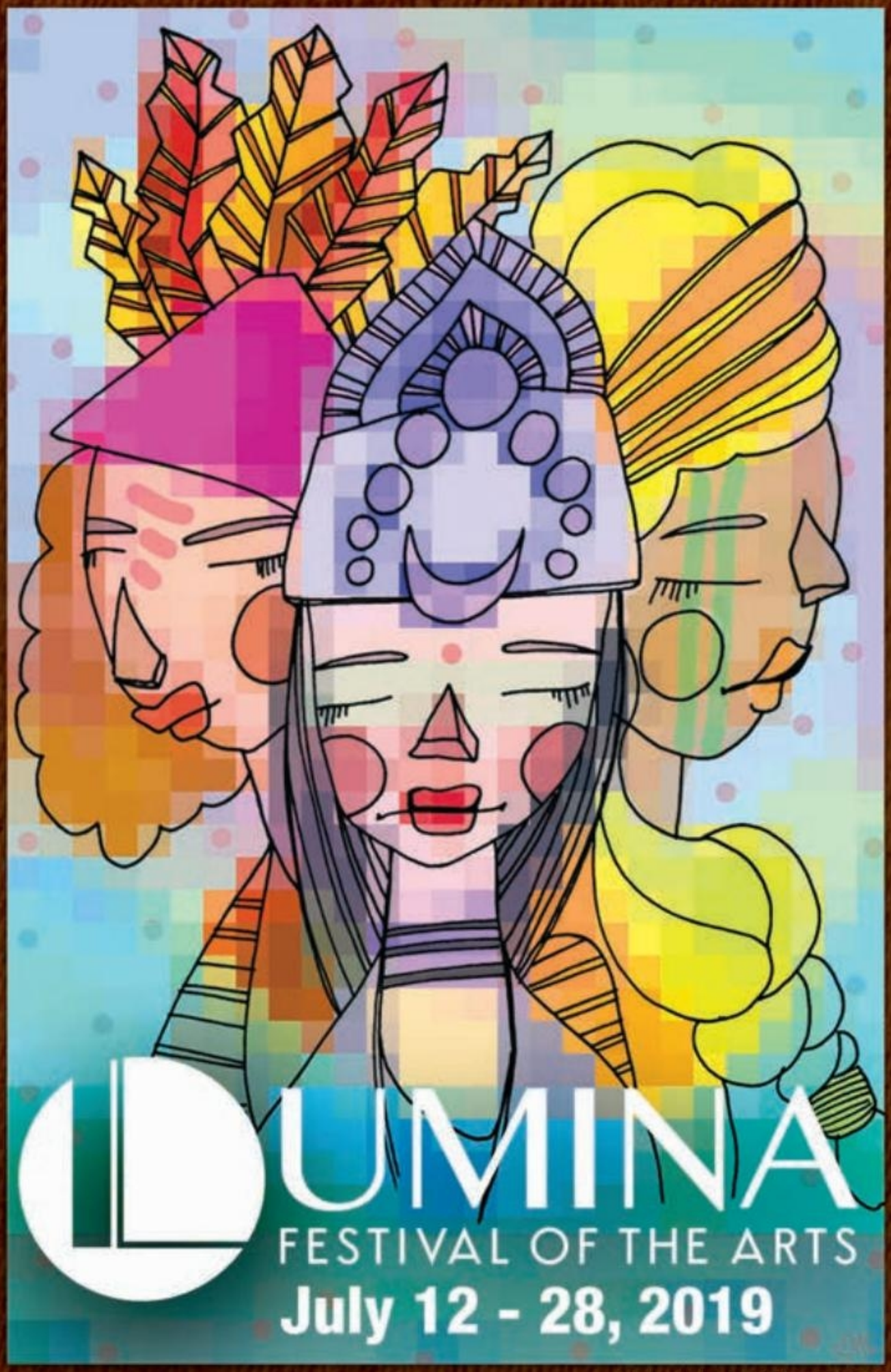

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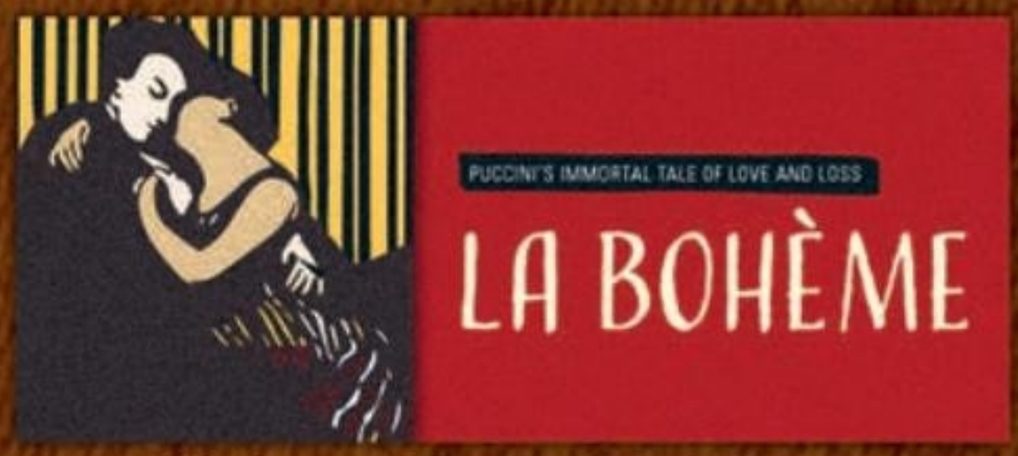

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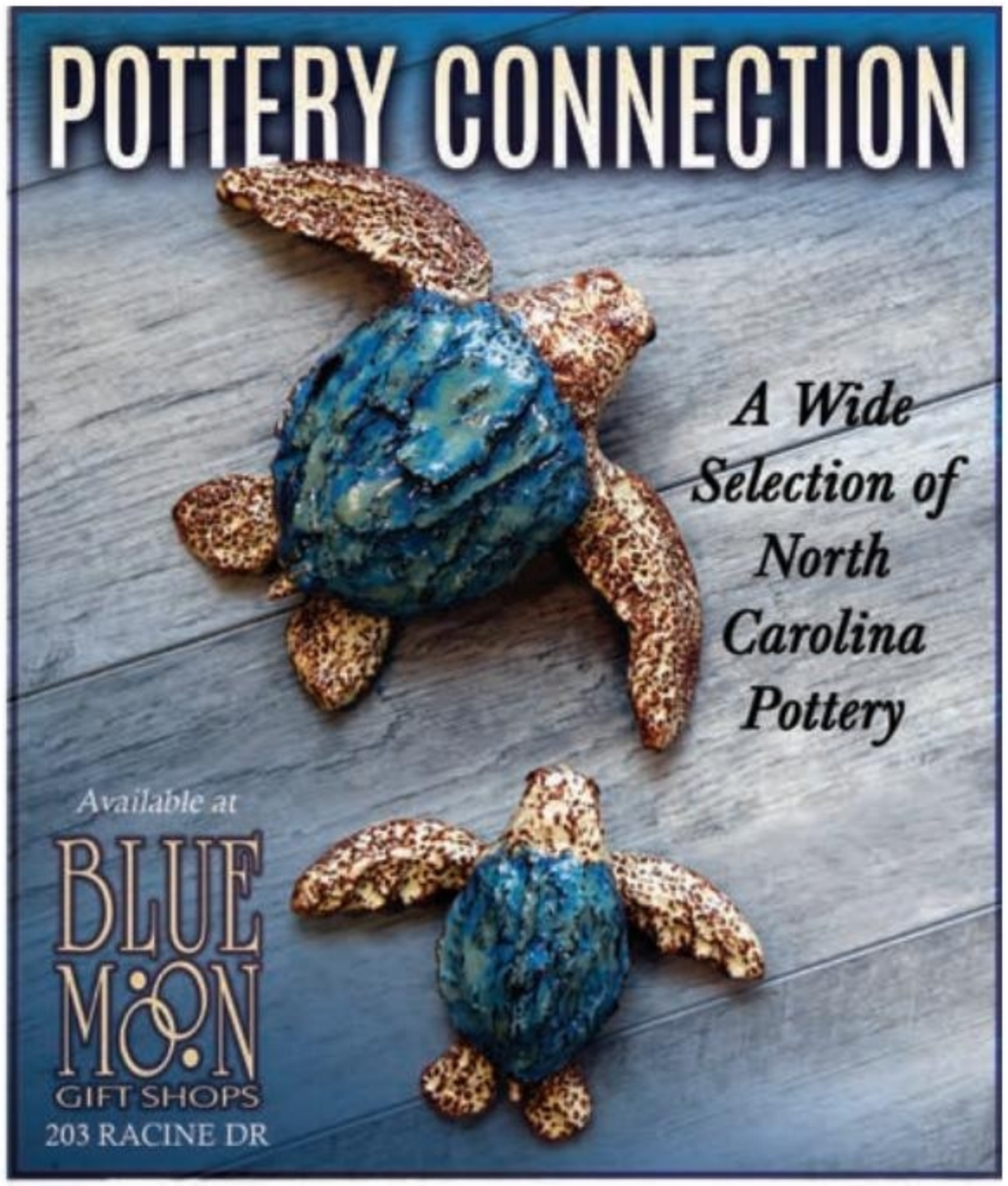
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The Road to Happiness

It's an upward climb filled with twists and turns, but joy is in the journey

By Jim Dodson

A dear friend phoned the other day just to say hello, a gifted young poet I hired many years ago as our organization's first staff writer, who went on to become the senior editor of this magazine. I always knew the time would come when Ashley would fly away to new horizons, which she did after many years of our working together, moving to the mountains where she became a teacher, artist and musician. Lucky for us, her soulful perspective continues to grace the magazine's pages.

As old friends do, we spent a full half hour catching up on each other's lives.

I was pleased to learn about her current boyfriend and their travels to art festivals across the Southeast, where they sell handmade crafts created from sea glass, answering the muse and enjoying life on the road.

"You sound pretty happy," I ventured at one point.

"I am. Maybe never happier. How about you?"

I replied that I was happy at that moment because I was talking to her while sitting in a well-worn Adirondack chair on the lawn where I begin and end most of my day in quiet reflection, watching the dawn arrive and the day depart, usually with Mulligan the dog and Boo the cat by my side. When she called, my companions and I happened to be watching the first fireflies of the season dance in the dusk.

During our years working together, Ashley and I often fell into lengthy conversations about life, love, matters of faith and favorite poets. Among other things, we share an Aquarian sensibility about the future and how we must spiritually evolve in order to get there in one piece as a race of scattered and fractured human beings.

I wasn't surprised when she asked what things make me happy these days.

I gave her my short and simple list: rainy Sundays, walks with my wife and our dogs, working in my garden, driving back roads, early church, books and movies that stir the heart, phone calls from my grown children and suppers on the porch with friends.

"What about writing?" she asked.

"Cheap therapy."

She laughed.

"Maybe you should write a book about happiness."

This notion made me laugh.

Somewhere I'd read that there are more than 500 books on the subject of happiness in print, proving happiness is purely in the eye — or soul — of the beholder.

Besides, I confessed, my kind of happiness was increasingly fueled by things I'd given up or simply no longer needed for the journey, a list that included, but was not limited to, late-night fears of failure, desires for wealth or fame, judging other flawed human beings, even my once all-consuming love of sports was practically gone.

True to the spirit of our talks, I turned the question around on her. Ashley didn't hesitate.

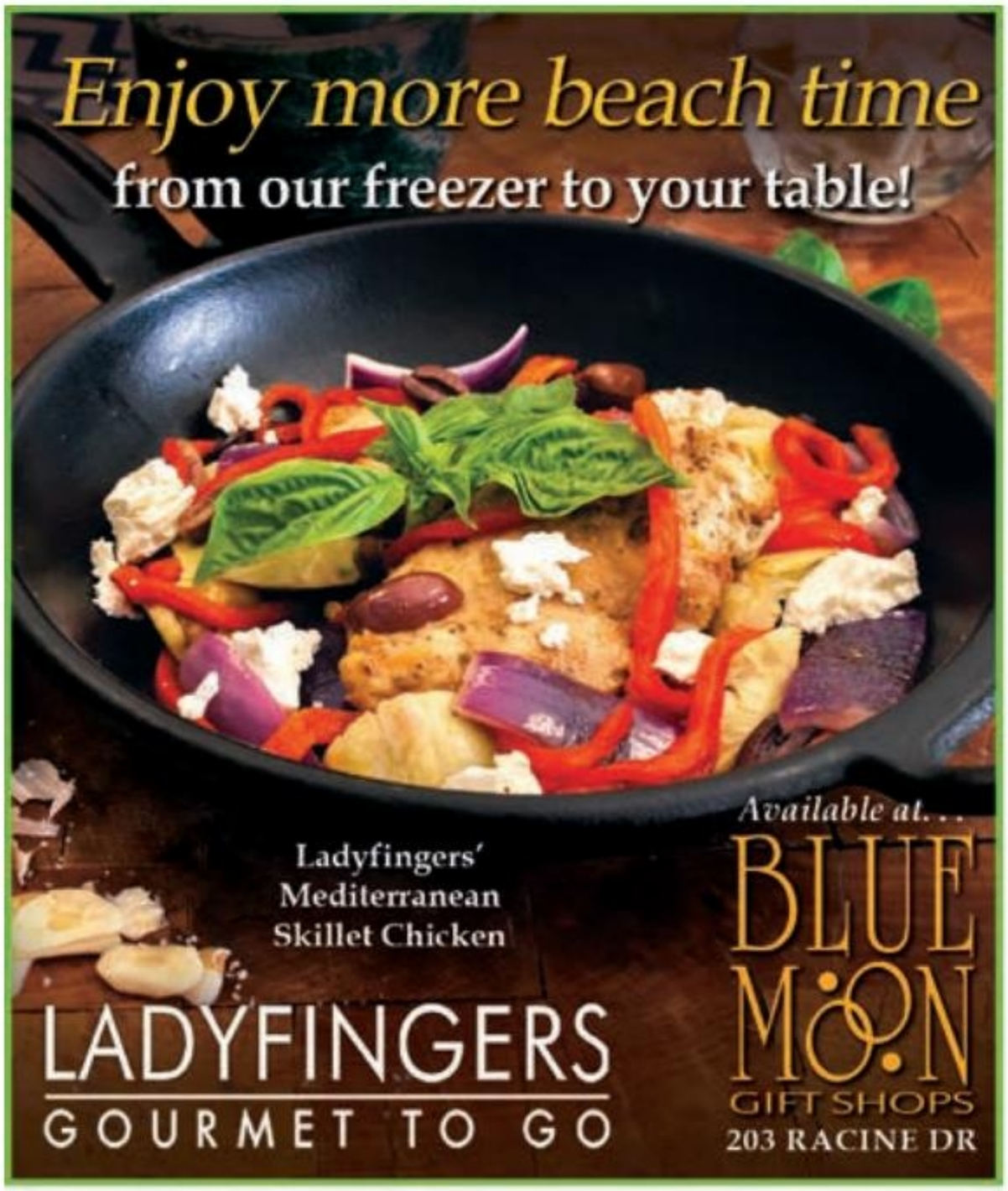
"I think happiness comes when you are following your heart and doing good things for others."

Her prescription reminded me of something I'd just read in commentator David Brooks' outstanding new book *The Second Mountain – The Quest for a Moral Life*.

"Often," Brooks writes, "we say a good life is a happy life. We live, as it says in our founding document, in pursuit of happiness. In all forms of happiness we feel good, elated, uplifted. But the word 'happiness' can mean a lot of different things."

Brooks makes an important distinction, for instance, between things that make us happy — a good marriage, a successful career, a sense of material achievement — and the rarer experience of joy.

"Happiness involves a victory for the self, an expansion of self. Happiness comes when we move toward our goals, when things go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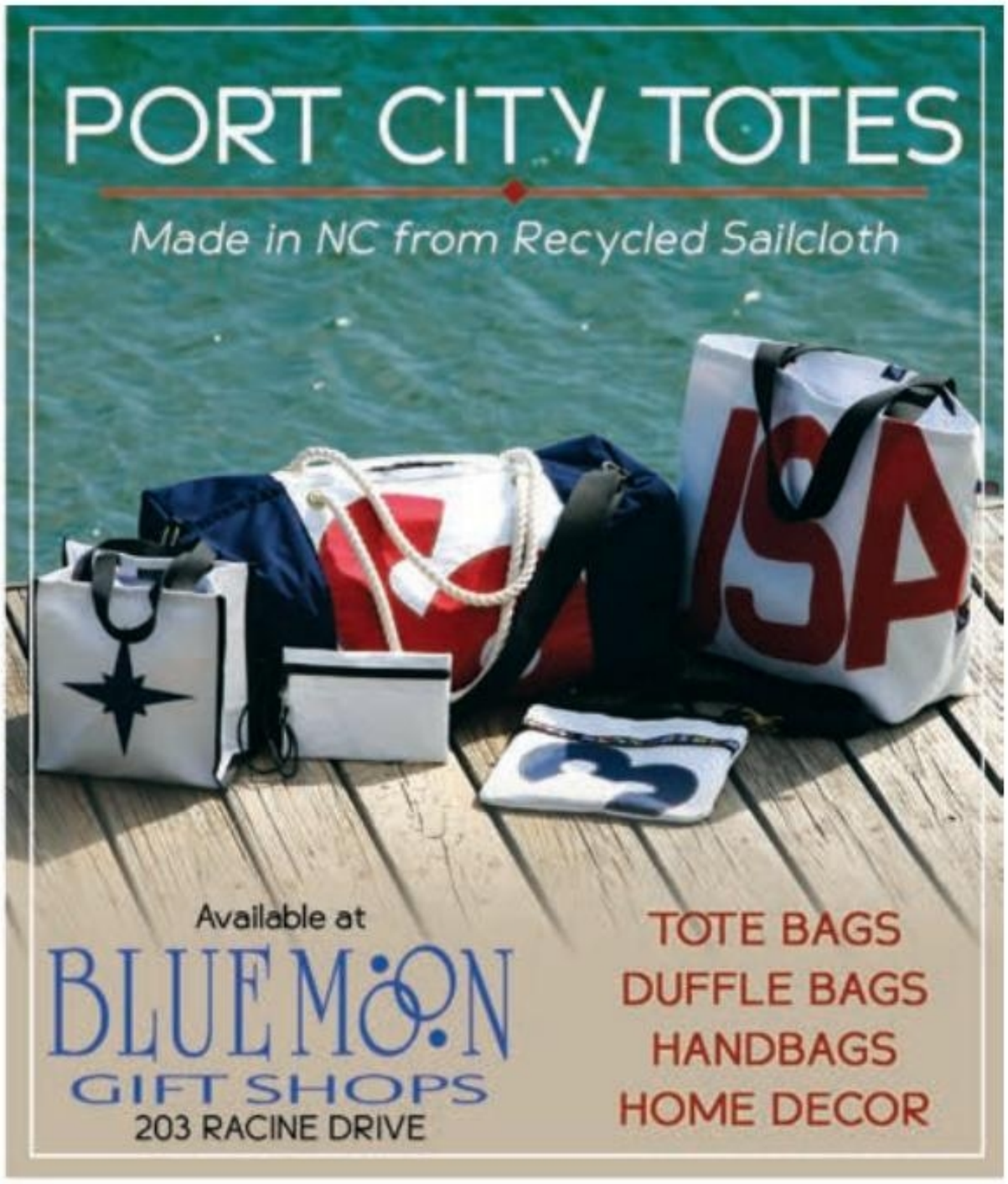
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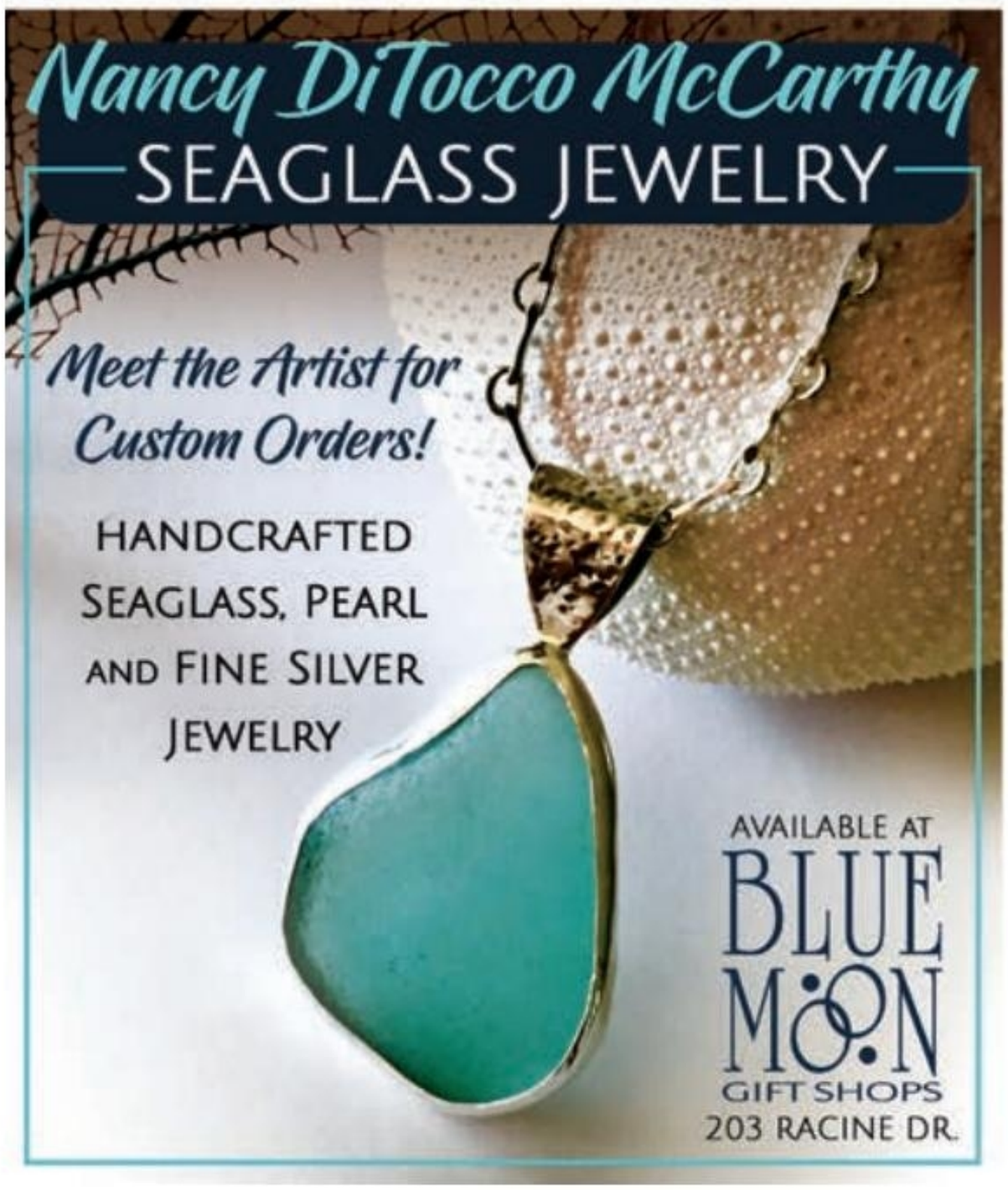
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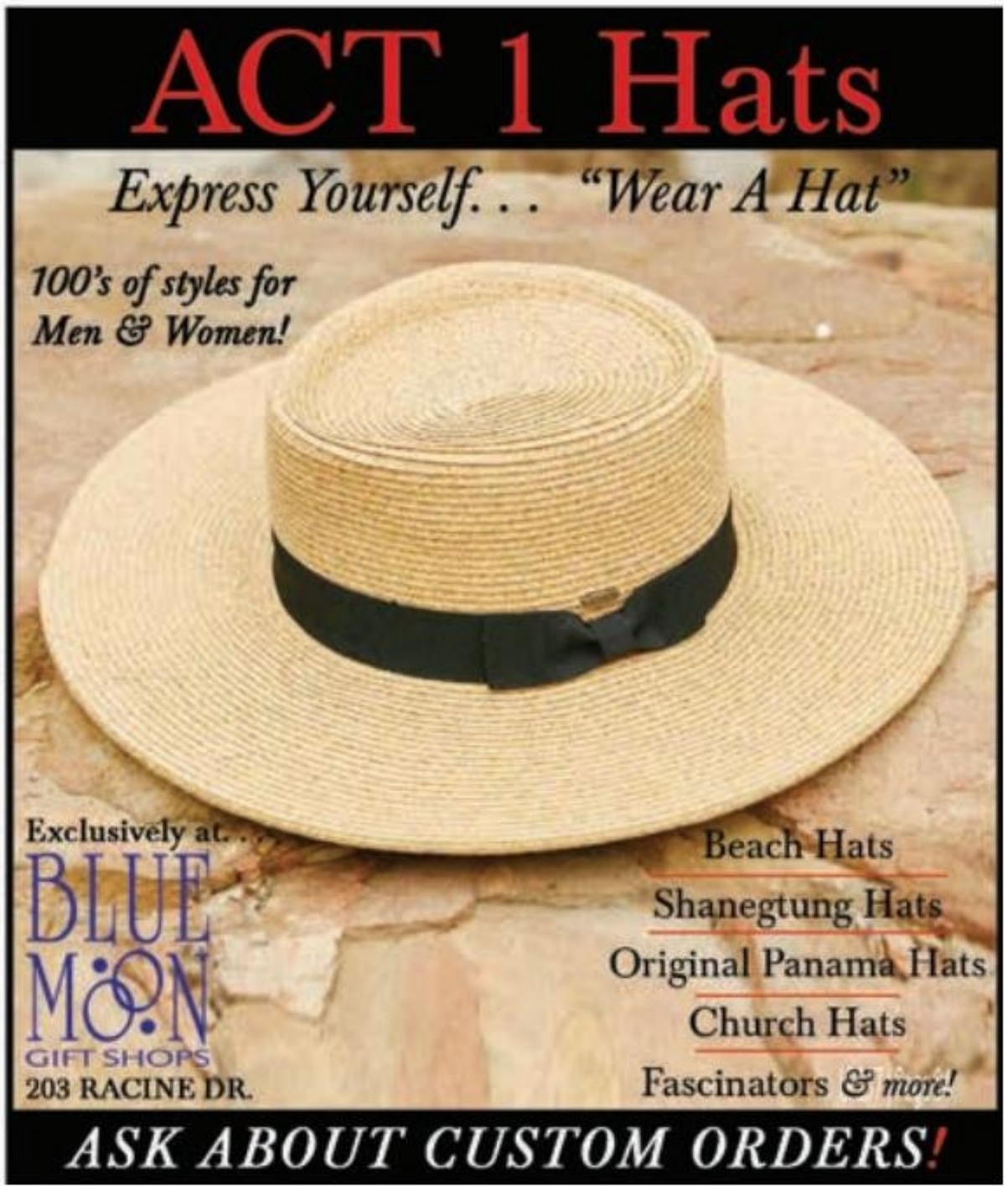
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our way. You get a big promotion. You graduate from college. Your team wins the Super Bowl. You have a delicious meal. Happiness often has to do with some success, some new ability, or some heightened sensual pleasure."

Joy, on the other hand, he posits, has to do with some transcendence of self, comes almost unbidden when "the skin barrier between you and some other person or entity fades away and you feel fused together. Joy is present when mother and baby are gazing adoringly into each other's eyes, when a hiker is overwhelmed by the beauty in the woods and feels at one with nature, when a gaggle of friends are dancing deliriously in union. Joy often involves self-forgetting.

"We can help create happiness," Brooks concludes, "but we are seized by joy. We are pleased by happiness, but we are transformed by joy."

The day after catching up with Ashley, I was on a winding road deep in the Blue Ridge mountains of Virginia, chasing pieces of Wagon Road history and human stories for my next book — something that always makes me happy — unable to get our conversation about happiness out of my head.

The art of happiness, if there is such a thing, my version of it anyway, seems to be about an inward journey cultivated by intentionally making room in life for small restorative acts and daily rituals that invite you to step out of your hectic, overscheduled life into what Irish mystics called a thin space, a place where duty and obligation are put on hold and deeper mindfulness is possible. Without my early morning communion with the stars and the grateful prayers I send up like sparks from a signal fire to the gods, my day is curiously never fully complete.

For what it's worth, I also agree with Ashley the poet and Brooks the wise counselor that service of the smallest order to others in a world where there is so much isolation, loneliness and suffering may be the truest pathway to a happier, more meaningful life, a true "Second Mountain" existence.

Since most of my days are spent in quiet working isolation — Hemingway, not a happy camper, called writing the "loneliest art" — I find myself these days almost unconsciously seeking out opportunities to commit some kind of tiny random act of kindness to a fellow stranger in need. The other day, I chased down a harried mother's runaway grocery cart in the parking lot of Harris-Teeter. She had an infant on her hip and was struggling to unlock her SUV. Her grateful smile and warm thanks were like a liberating breeze to a weary brain that had been arm-wrestling words and sentences onto the page most of that day.

During our pre-dawn walks around the neighborhood each day, my wife began stopping by the house of an elderly shut-in lady to walk her newspaper from the curb to a chair by her front door. We've never seen our neighbor's face. But the dogs insist on stopping to deliver her paper the final 50 feet. To paraphrase C.S. Lewis on prayer, this minuscule act of neighborliness may do nothing whatsoever for God, but it sure makes us all feel a tiny bit happier.

The 17th-century Buddhist monk Gensei wrote, "With the happiness held in one inch-square heart, you can fill the whole space between heaven and Earth."

Sometimes, we need to be reminded of this fact. A friend who works with the homeless explained to me that perhaps the hardest things homeless people deal with on a daily basis is a feeling that they are not

worthy of noticing or speaking to — are, in effect, invisible travelers in our midst.

This prompted a change a shift in my awareness and behavior, from that of feeling uneasy and even slightly resentful whenever I reach into my pocket to offer whatever modest sum may be there, to making a point of looking in the eyes and sharing a few words of ordinary greeting or simple recognition, maybe even learning a name and sharing mine. We are, after all, all traveling the same road between Earth and heaven.

It's a lesson I seem destined to repeatedly learn. Watching Notre Dame cathedral in Paris burn live on CNN back in the spring, I was suddenly transported to a rainy July day 18 years ago when my son, Jack, then 10, and I were coming out of the famous cathedral in a thunderstorm. Surrounded by a swarm of tourist umbrellas dashing for cover, as we hurried past a lone ragged man with blind eyes standing in the downpour, simply holding out an upturned palm, a character straight from Victor Hugo, a dignified beggar for God.

No one was stopping. But when I saw my son glance back, something stopped me. I gave my son 100 francs and asked him to go and give it to the man. Without hesitation, he threaded back through the on-rushing umbrellas and placed the folded money into the man's outstretched hand.

What happened next still gives me goose bumps of unexpected joy — the kind of self-forgetting transcendence David Brooks speaks of.

The blind man placed his free hand gently on Jack's head, as if bestowing a blessing. Watching, my eyes filled with tears, or maybe simply rain. Or both. "What did he say to you?" I asked as we hurried off to find a dry lunch in a cozy Left Bank bistro.

"I don't know," he said with a happy smile. "But it was in French and it sounded nice."

Last summer, at the end of a walking pilgrimage across Tuscany with my wife and 30 other pilgrims, I skipped the private tour of the Vatican's famous Sistine Chapel in favor of climbing a leafy Roman hill to a small Greek Orthodox Church where I sat on a simple wooden pew for God knows how long listening to morning prayers being sung in Greek by three exquisite voices.

Save for an elderly woman manning a small stand at the rear entrance of the church, I was the only worshipper in the building, sitting beneath the tiny dome of a stunning blue ceiling painted with stars, angels and saints.

Time completely vanished, taking my weary feet with it.

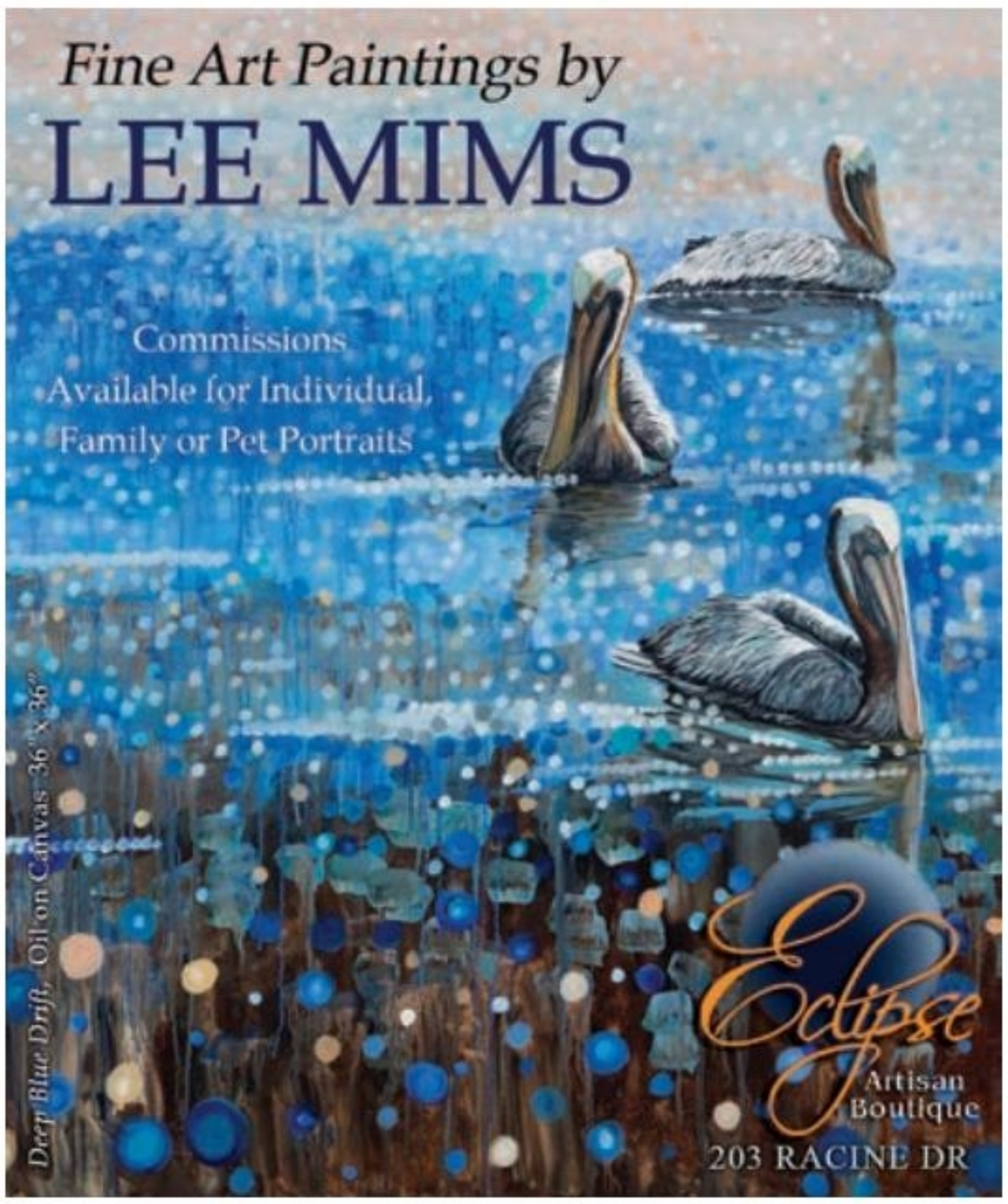
Unexpectedly, it was the happiest moment of my long journey that week.

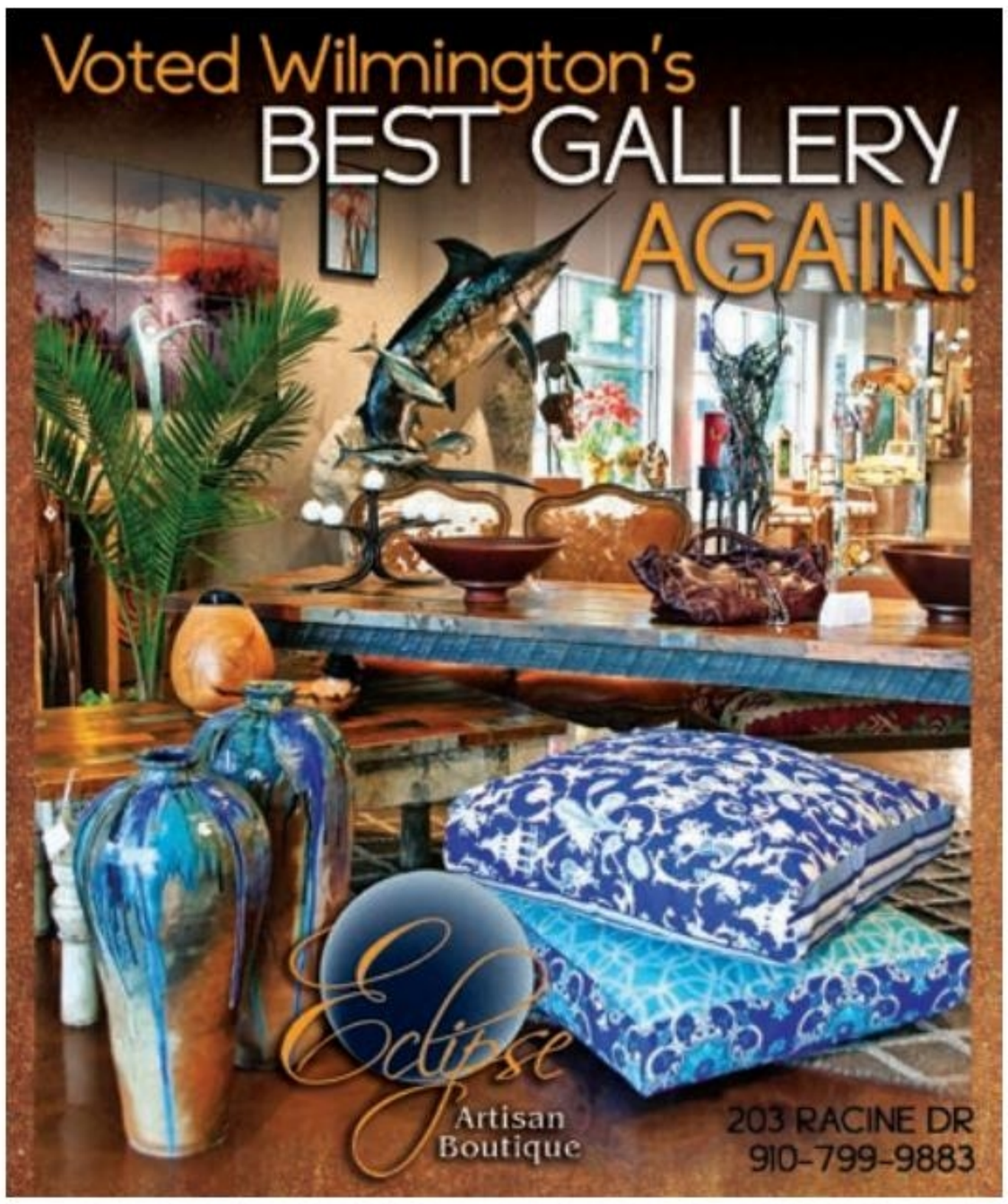
On the way out, the old woman smiled and waved me over to her stand, handing me a small gilt-framed portrait of an Eastern Saint. I'm still not sure which one.

When I reached into my pocket to pay, she gave me a gentle smile and nod, waving me on with gentle words.

I have no idea what she said to me. I believe it was in Greek and it sounded nice.

Contact Editor Jim Dodson at jim@thepilot.com.





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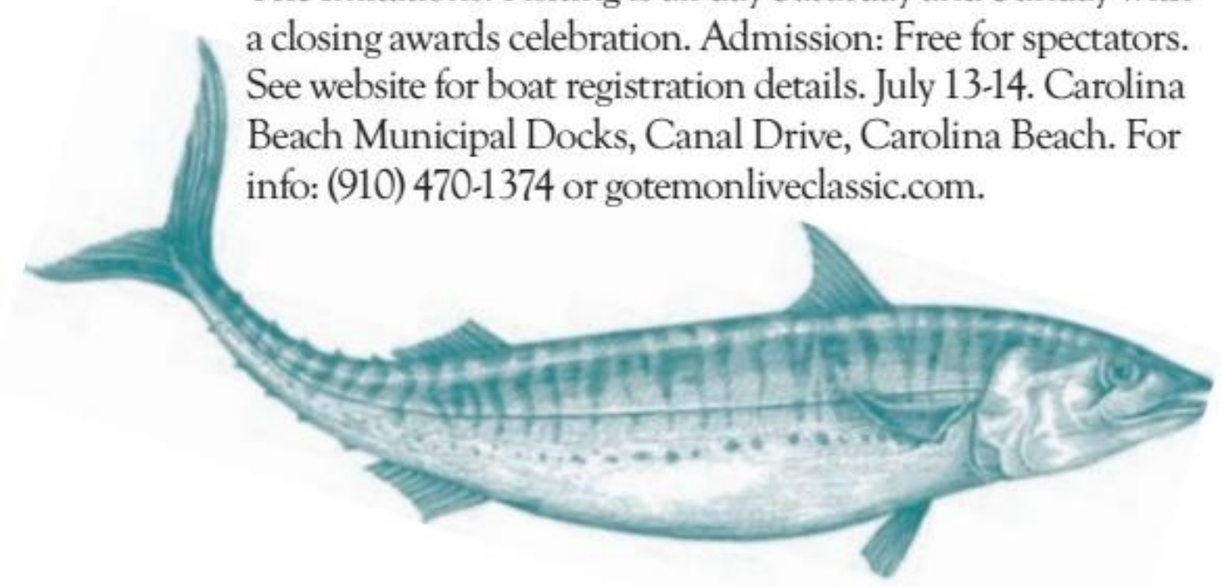


Lumina Festival

UNCW Presents and Opera Wilmington's annual celebration of the arts of the coastal South returns this summer. Among the offerings: Opera Wilmington's production of Puccini's *La Boheme*, Make Trouble's performance of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, and a Latin Dance Salsa Party. For single tickets and passes, see website. July 12-28, various venues in Wilmington. Info: (910) 962-3500 or uncw.edu/arts/lumina.

Poetry Crawl, Y'all !

Florida-based poet Brendan Walsh hosts the Great American Poetry Crawl, a traveling reading tour with stops at seven independent bookstores between Florida and Rhode Island, including Old Books on Front Street. At the Wilmington

event, Walsh will be joined by local authors Melissa Crowe and Khalisa Rae for an evening of poetry readings and literary performance. Admission: Free. July 8, 7 p.m. Old Books on Front Street, 249 N. Front Street, Wilmington. For info: brendanwalshpoetry.com.

Stars and Stripes Forever

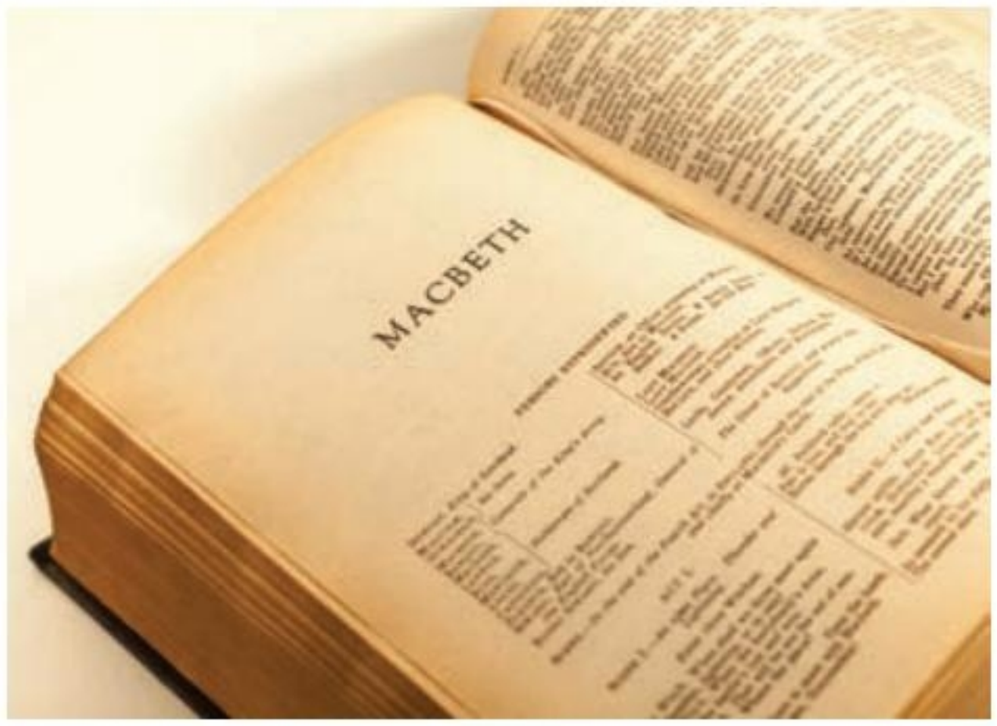
Southport has one of America's oldest Fourth of July celebrations, and the tradition continues with this year's North Carolina Fourth of July Festival, a weekend-long celebration with a wide range of activities, patriotic and otherwise. A list of some of these, in no particular order: Cape Fear Yacht Club's Commodore Regatta, the Fourth of July parade, fireworks, a classsic car show, naturalization and flag-raising ceremonies, 100 arts and crafts booths, a firefighter's competition, and a pancake breakfast. Admission: Free. See website for full schedule of events. Nash and Howe Streets, Southport. For info: (910) 457-6964 or nc4thofjuly.com.

Lost Love Song

Samuel Coleridge Taylor, a London musician, was considered "the first great black composer." He was inspired after seeing an appearance by the Fisk Jubilee Singers, whose lead soprano, Carrie Sadgawar, was the future wife of Alex Manly, the editor of the *Daily Record*, Wilmington's black newspaper, which was destroyed in the coup of 1898. These and other intertwining stories come together in "Lost Love Song," a musical evening featuring Grammy Award-winning musician Rhiannon Giddens, jazz and blues legend Regina Carter, and acclaimed author John Jeremiah Sullivan. Tickets: $20-$50. July 22, 7:30 p.m. UNCW Kenan Auditorium, 515 Wagoner Drive, Wilmington. For info: uncw.edu/arts/lumina.

Behind the Curtain

The Alchemical Theatre Company takes you behind the scenes for a special Shakespeare performance. "In blood, stepped in so far — The Macbeths" explores the consequences of murder on a couple's relationship. Professional Shakespearean actors Christopher Marino and Esther Williams will perform the roles of the Macbeths and their plot to murder the King of Scotland. Alchemical's college-age troupe, Make Trouble, will perform Shakespeare excerpts and Robin Post will discuss the Shakespeare and Autism program. Tickets: $40-$60. July 20, 7:30 p.m. UNCW, Kenan Auditorium, 515 Wagoner Drive, Wilmington. For info and tickets: (910) 962-3500 or uncw.edu/arts/lumina.



Jazz on the Beach

The Ocean City Jazz Festival celebrates its 10th anniversary this year, with a stellar lineup that includes Jazmin Ghent, the John Brown Little Band, and the OCJF All -Stars, featuring Cyrus Chestnut, Mark Whitfield, Derrick Gardner and John Brown. In addition to the music there will be a beer and wine tasting on July 4, and a gospel concert and brunch on Sunday. Tickets: $50-$60. July 4-7. Historic Ocean City, 2649 Island Drive, North Topsail Beach. For info: (910) 459-9263 or oceancityjazzfest.com.

And That's The Truth

Legendary comedian Lily Tomlin will appear at the Wilson Center for "An Evening of Classic Lily Tomlin." In addition to her recent work with Jane Fonda on the television hit series *Grace and Frankie*, Tomlin has received the Mark Twain Prize for American Humor and was the recipient of the prestigious Kennedy Center Honors in 2014. Oh — and don't forget Edith Ann on *Laugh-In*! Tickets: $40-$99. July 18, 7:30 p.m. Wilson Center, 703 N. Third Street, Wilmington. For info: (910) 362-7999 or tickets@capefearstage.com.

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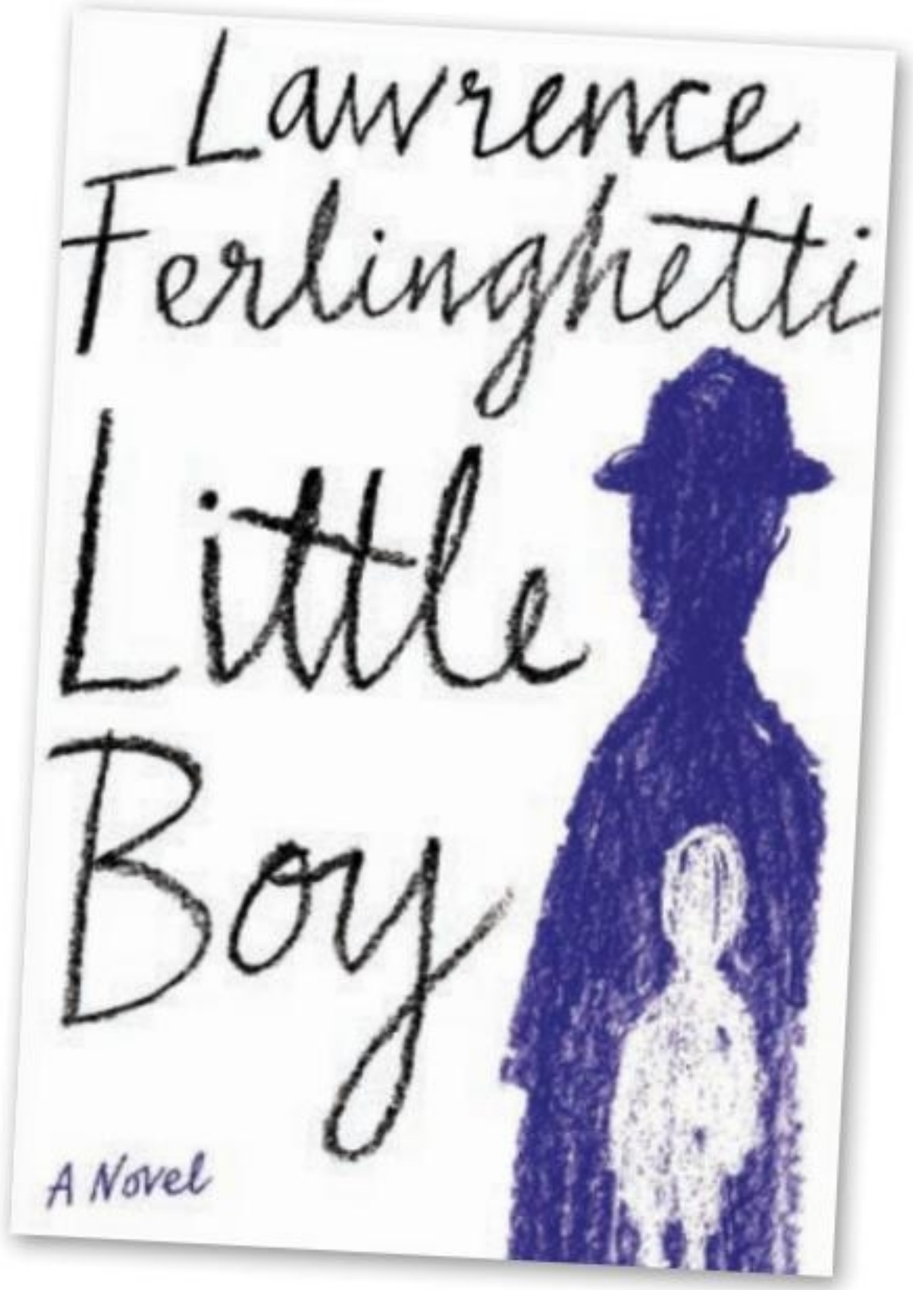
EQUAL HOUSING LENDER

Ferlinghetti's Torrent of Words

Little Boy offers little wisdom



By Stephen E. Smith

Here's the theory: If a writer drags his audience into unknown intellectual territory — even if the journey's destination is an unpleasant one — he's lifted his readers out of the familiar and allowed them to perceive the world from a new and revelatory perspective. Lawrence Ferlinghetti's *A Coney Island of the Mind* did that for a generation of poets, and the book remains one of the best-selling collections with over a million copies in print.

Ferlinghetti also achieved literary fame by publishing and defending in federal court Allen Ginsberg's *Howl*. The lengthy First Amendment trial became a literary *cause célèbre*, and in the years since the *Howl* controversy, Ferlinghetti has continued to support leftist social and political causes while producing his own volumes of poetry and prose.

His latest book, *Little Boy*, was published on the author's 100th birthday and immediately climbed the best-sellers list. Billed by its publisher as "a novel" and "last will and testament," the book isn't a novel, not in the traditional sense, and it isn't the last word on anything. Call it bait and switch or simple misrepresentation, but *Little Boy* is, for better or worse, an adventurous, effusive, stream-of-consciousness rant that begins promisingly as a memoir complete with punctuation, plot and character development, and lapses almost immediately into an unpunctuated acerbic toxic word dump that occasionally sweeps up the reader in its rebellious energy.

If the designation "novel" is misleading, Ferlinghetti manages to hide a cursory explanation deep in his tangled text: "Ah yes indeed I must revert instead to the recounting and accounting of my own fantasies my ideas and agitations and dumb contemplations of the workings of the mind and heart . . . And so do I return to the monologue of my life seen as an endless novel simply because I don't know how to end any life."

The opening 15 pages of *Little Boy* recount how Ferlinghetti was separated from his mother shortly after birth, grew up in both privilege and poverty, and eventually graduated from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, completing his doctoral study in comparative literature in France — all of which is conveyed in straightforward third-person prose. Then the structure of the narrative abruptly transforms, launching into a torrent of words sans grammatical niceties, e.g.: " . . . the Greeks really all gone now down the drain And shall we tally it up now and see what's left after capitalism hits the fan But in any case now it's time it's high tide time to try to make some sense or cents of our little life on earth and is it not all a dumb show of mummery a blindman's bluff a buffoon's antic asininities with clowns in masks jumping over the moon as in a Chagall painting or as if we each were dropped out of a womb into this earth so naked and alone we come to this world and blind in our courses, where do we wander and know not where we go nor what we do, with no assigned destinies . . . ."

There's nothing new about this narrative technique (Joyce gave

us Molly Bloom's monologue more than a century ago), and Ferlinghetti's deluge of words wears thin with surprising alacrity.

With the exception of an occasional brief interlude of traditional storytelling, he continues in this vein for the remainder of the novel. Since the monologue is essentially plotless, he rails again about global warming, capitalism, fascism, socialism, people with cellphones — "can you imagine millions of them a whole new generation on earth computing their lives in pixels" — and the world in general: ". . . it's all like the old film *The King of Hearts* in which the inmates of an asylum consider themselves the only sane people in the world, while the people outside go forth every day to murder their dreams and ecstasies in the general conflagration of everyday life in the twenty-first century . . . ."

Allusions abound, most of them employed as similes or used as foils or objects of derision as in "'Tea Ass' Elliot" or twisted into puns as in "Let's not fall deep into romanticism again for the warming world is too much with us late and soon . . ." And there are literary references galore, if you can identify them: "Let us go then you and me-me-me . . ." "Drive she said," or "a tale of sound and furry animals."

And the name-dropping goes on ad nauseam: Thorstein Veblen, Nelson Algren, Louise Brooks, Mikhail Lermontov, J. M.W. Turner, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Sri Aurobindo, Giacometti, Edward Bellcamp, etc., personages with whom most readers are probably unfamiliar. Unfortunately, Ferlinghetti makes no use of these allusions. He's in a position to supply important scholarly insights into Ginsberg, Burroughs, Corso, Beckett, Kerouac, Sartre, etc., but the mention of literary celebrities has all the intellectual import of the cover of the Beatles' *Sgt. Pepper's* or an academic adaptation of *Where's Waldo?* Readers can research the luminaries Ferlinghetti mentions — how likely is that? — or they can let the allusions ride and go plunging through the text, which is, of course, the more likely scenario.

Readers might presume, given Ferlinghetti's appetite for social and political causes, that he'd have something to

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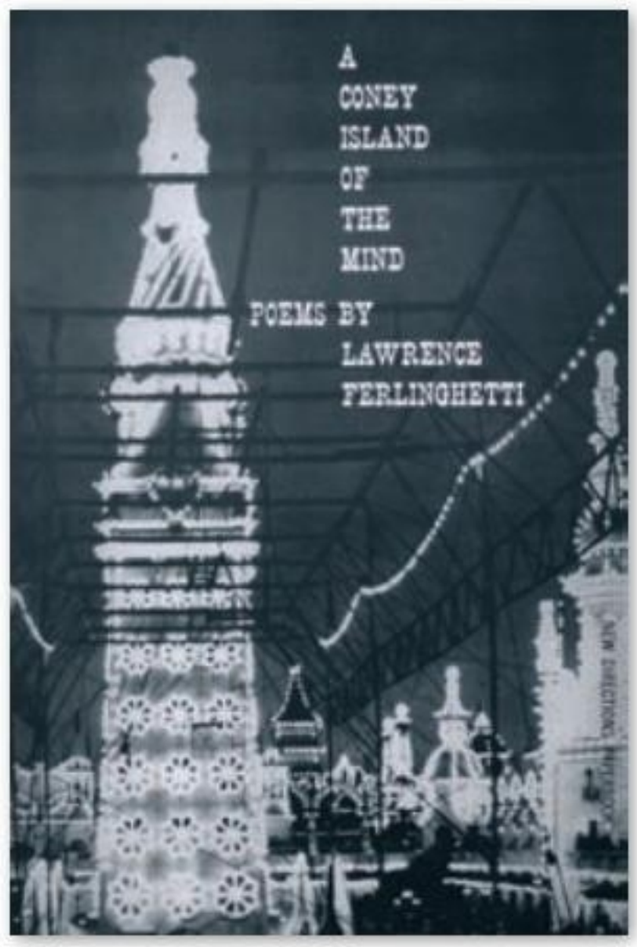
say about the political state of the country in which he's lived for a century. It's not unreasonable, after all, to expect a little wisdom from our elders, but Ferlinghetti disappoints on this count. Perhaps he's correct when he writes: ". . . so I am just an onion peeling myself down to the core to find there is nothing there at all. . . ." The opening lines of his *Coney Island* poem "I Am Waiting"—". . . and I am waiting/ for the American Eagle/to really spread its wings/and straighten up and fly right . . ." — has more political oomph than all the words in *Little Boy*, and the sum of all



the complaints and observations spewed forth in the novel tell us little more than we learned in *A Coney Island of the Mind*.

Ferlinghetti's longevity and literary reputation have earned him the right to offer a parting public thought. For better or worse, this might be it: ". . . so bye-bye civilization as we know it and should I just let everybody else die as long as I got my piece of prime cheese oh man it's all beyond me-me-me . . . ."

Stephen E. Smith is a retired professor and the author of seven books of poetry and prose. He's the recipient of the Poetry Northwest Young Poet's Prize, the Zoe Kincaid Brockman Prize for poetry and four North Carolina Press awards.

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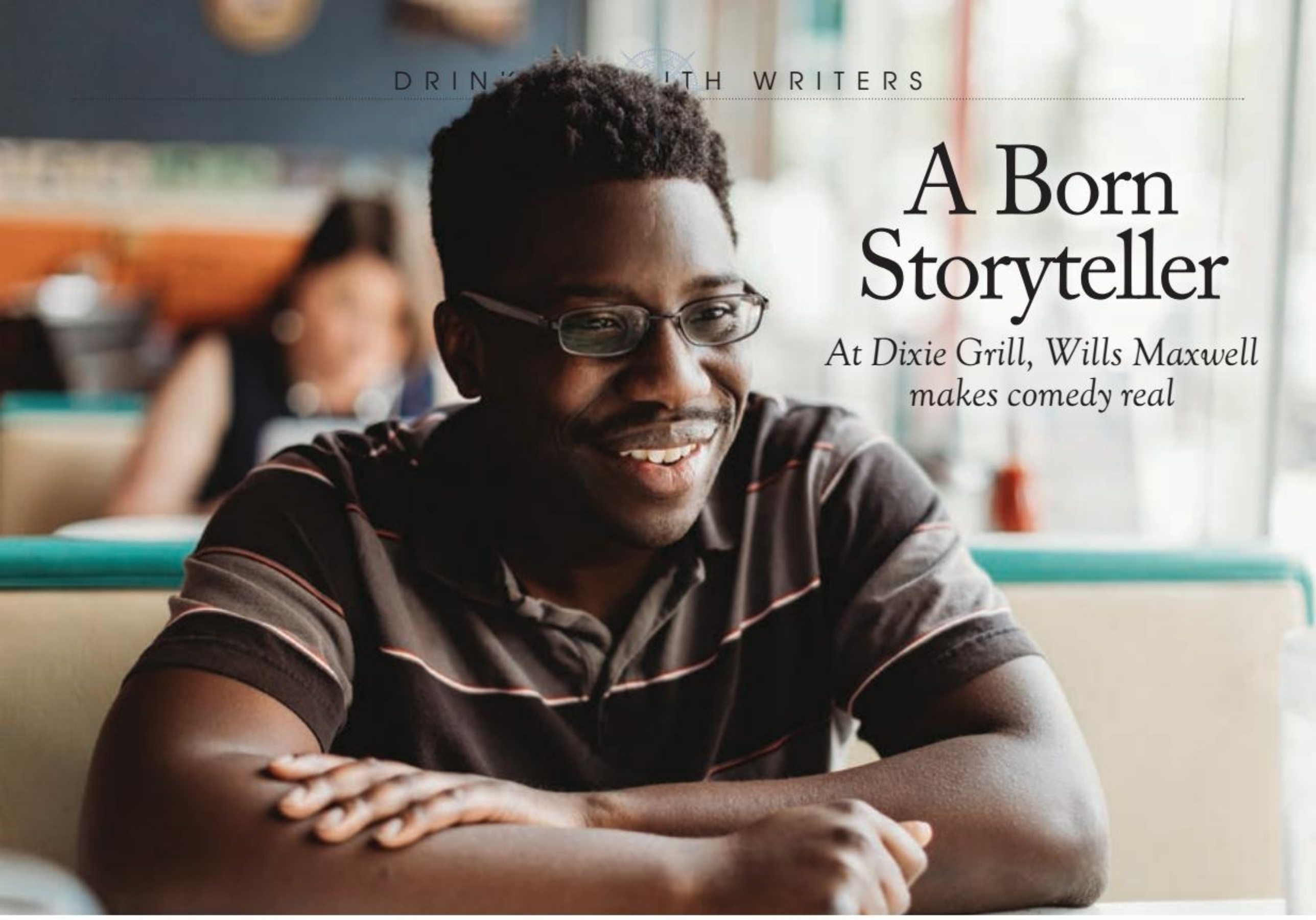

A Born Storyteller

At Dixie Grill, Wills Maxwell makes comedy real

By Wiley Cash · Photographs by Mallory Cash

Wilmington-based comedian Wills Maxwell routinely opens his sets with a joke about what he claims is his desire to fit in. "I'm a conformist," he says. "I'm such a conformist that the only reason I'm black is because everyone else in my family is."

The son of an attorney and an insurance claims adjuster, and the brother of three sisters — all of whom have advanced degrees — the career path Wills has taken proves he is not one bit concerned with conformity. Even when he was a kid growing up in Raleigh, Wills knew he wanted to be a storyteller.

"My ambition was to write comic books about superheroes," he says. "I wanted to tell stories however I could, so I came to UNC Wilmington and studied filmmaking and screenwriting and learned how to tell stories that way."

The skill Wills developed behind the camera landed him a job directing the morning news at WWAY TV-3, the NBC/CBS/CW affiliate in Wilmington, but it was his talent in front of the camera that landed him a weekly segment he calls "What Did We Miss?" in which he "tells you the stories that WWAY did not." The three-minute segments cover outlandish news, and they are marked by Wills' hilarious one-liners and asides. In one episode he covers a crew of car burglars in Los Angeles who are using scooters to flee the scenes of their crimes. In another episode, he covers the story of a man in an Easter bunny suit who breaks up a street fight without removing his mask.

It is no surprise that Wills is able to turn inane news items into comic gold. He has been perfecting his comedic timing and writing for several years, first on stage at Dead Crow Comedy Club in Wilmington, and later on stages across the Southeast. His big break came last year in Charlotte when he made it to the finals round of StandUp NBC, a nationwide search for stand-up comedians from diverse backgrounds. That success got him an invite to return to this year's Nashville competition and an automatic leapfrog to the second round, where he will have two minutes to earn another spot in the finals.

For Wills, it all comes down to storytelling: "Comedy lets me tell stories in a way that puts people into my perspective, so maybe they

can leave the show just a little more aware of how other people live."

Recently, Wills and I sat down for lunch at the Dixie Grill in downtown Wilmington, and as we ate — a club sandwich for me and a chicken finger basket for him — we discussed his desire for audiences to see things from his perspective. I ask him what that means to him.

"In the summer of 2015, I went to Charleston, South Carolina, to work on an independent film," he says. "I arrived in town a week after Walter Scott was shot in the back by a police officer while he was running from a traffic stop because he had a broken brake light. Filming wrapped and I left Charleston one week after Dylan Roof murdered nine people just because they were black."

He pauses and looks out the window at the tourists on the sidewalk, some of them heading north on Market Street toward the city's Confederate monuments.

"Those were dark bookends to my summer in Charleston," he says. "Even before those tragedies I was on edge and paranoid, and I was thrown by Charleston's adoration for the Confederacy. But I found some kind of relief in seeing the Confederate flag being flown because it showed me that I was not welcome everywhere. I did not have to rely on suspicion. It was proof."

I ask him if it is hard to take these serious issues and make them funny in front of an audience.

"It can be hard," he says. "The goal is to make people laugh and to make them feel good, but I want things to stick with people in a way that makes them say, 'Oh, I've never thought of it like that.'

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After Walter Scott was shot, I made jokes about being afraid of the police. Now, maybe someone in the audience doesn't have my paranoia about the police, but if they hear my jokes it may make them understand a little about why I feel afraid."

I comment that all comedy is based on tragedy, either your own or someone else's.

"And laughing helps us understand it," Wills adds. "It helps us look at someone else's tragedy and really see it, but every audience is different."

Later, this summer, Wills will be returning to Raleigh Supercon, a three-day festival for people who love comic books, science fiction, fantasy and video games. "It's nice to be in front of a crowd that gets my jokes about the Power Rangers," he says.

I imagine that it is also nice for him to get away on a weekend instead of pulling late nights in clubs after waking up at 3 a.m. to get to the news station to prepare for that morning's show. I ask him how he does it, how he works the stage late into the night and works behind the camera early in the morning.

"I feed myself," he says. "I stay alive. I pursue what I want to do."

Spoken like a true nonconformist.

Wiley Cash lives in Wilmington with his wife and their two daughters. His latest novel, The Last Ballad, *is available wherever books are sold.*

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Rescue Me

A few questions for someone who may save your life

By Dana Sachs

Jeremy Owens: Ocean rescue captain, Wrightsville Beach

Can you describe your job?
I'm the Ocean Rescue captain for Wrightsville Beach. Along with Dave Baker, the Ocean Rescue director, I hire and train lifeguards, maintain equipment, basically take care of everything as far as ocean rescue. And I'm also a fire captain.

How did you end up in this career?
When I was younger, I was always surfing. My father was actually a lifeguard at Wrightsville Beach back in the '60s. I went to college in Hawaii and, when I came back here, I got hired on as a seasonal lifeguard in 2003. It became a passion.

Is there a fitness standard that people have to meet to become lifeguards?
We have a tryout in the beginning of the season. They have a 1/2-mile swim and a 1-mile run. And then they do a series of mock rescues. We recruit a lot of UNCW swimmers. We get a lot of surfers. We get a lot of people that are generally into fitness, so they come to work in shape.

And how do you train them?
It's a two-week training period for the new guards. They do an open-water USLA (United States Lifesaving Association) course and an emergency medical responder course. Our training is beach-specific. We get some really good swimmers that don't know about the ocean so much. We teach them how to spot rip currents, how to make rescues in the ocean, how to pull active and passive victims out of the water, how to move people with spinal injuries. The ocean is an ever-changing environment. It's very dynamic and powerful. We're training our guards in that environment.

How many of your lifeguards are women?
I would say that, out of our 60 guards, we have about 10 women. They are tremendous athletes, completely capable of doing this job.

Do you think they have to deal with disrespect sometimes?
Probably. But when you see a 100-pound woman swim out and save a 220-pound Marine, then all doubts are gone, because that happens all the time.

What emergencies do you see at the beach?
Lacerations. Spinal emergencies. Drownings. Those are the major ones. But the most common incidents? Handing out Band-Aids, small lacerations, jellyfish stings. Stingray punctures. Heat emergencies. Pretty much any way people have found to cut themselves, they will. I don't really want to talk about shark stuff, but we've had that as well.

Let's talk about shark stuff.
Rip currents are much more dangerous. Way more common. That's what people need to be concerned with out there. How to spot rip currents. How to get out of rip currents. And lightning's much more dangerous, too. It kills many more people than sharks. When there's lightning during the summer, we go up and down the beach and advise swimmers about the lightning.

Not sharks?
They're out there. It's their environment. But it's not something people need to be concerned with. We're out there swimming every single day. I think the last time we had an issue was a fisherman trying to unhook a shark. That was a couple of years ago.

What happened to the fisherman?
They left before we even got down to the beach.

Have you noticed a change over the years in terms of the life of the beach?
As Wilmington grows, we're seeing a tremendous increase in the number of people that come. If it's a nice day, it doesn't matter if it's January — there are people out on the beach.

On busy days in the middle of the summer, how do lifeguards manage to keep an eye on all those people?
They have different techniques. Watching the rip currents, watching the individual swimmers. You're looking at people, seeing their swimming ability as they enter the water. And grouping certain blocks of people together. If you're watching the water, and a

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group of people are swimming together, if someone gets in trouble, people react to that. You watch the beach strand, crowds gathering.

Can you remember a specific incident when that happened?
A couple of years ago, at Johnnie Mercer's Pier, I remember that the lifeguards saw a big reaction from the crowd. They saw someone in distress. The lifeguards responded to it and assisted, pulling a spinal injury out of the water. It was a Marine who had been body surfing in the shore break. The waves drove him into the sand. We pulled him out of the water and immobilized him. He survived.

What happens if there's a tragedy? How does your team support each other?
People talk about it. You look at it more as a problem, and how we could have done better. I think that's the best way we have to handle it. From each tragedy, we try to have a learning experience and growth.

It does seem like this is a job that could weigh on you in the middle of the night.
Yeah. I remember the first drowning that I had. It was my first day as captain. The beach was turned over to me. A guy drowned next to Johnnie Mercer's Pier. It weighed very heavily on me. The first thing I did was call my family and talk to them. Afterward, I was, like, "What can I do to make this not happen again?" So, when we have lifeguards in the stands, we diligently keep swimmers away from the pier. That's probably my pet peeve about the beach — that one area — keeping people away from the pier. That was how I handled that problem. You kind of get used to the responsibility, but I think the first incident you have like that is the hardest to get through. You never forget. And you always remember how much responsibility you have.

So, you've had a lot of experience going out into the water to save people.
Yeah. One day, we had 22 people caught in a rip during one of the hurricanes. We swam out. We'd get them on our buoy. We have a Jet-Ski that will pick them up as well.

It was during a hurricane?
That was during Hurricane Bill a couple of years ago.

Those are times when people are warned away from the water.
We fly red flags.

How does that feel?
When you save everyone, it feels great.

But, I mean, how does it feel when you're putting up red flags and people still go into the water?
It keeps you on edge.

You're very unemotional about it. I can imagine feeling some frustration.
We just accept it as our job. Those are the days when you're going to be on edge all day long. But, to be out there and save people — that's what these guys live for.

Dana Sachs' latest novel, The Secret of the Nightingale Palace, *is available at bookstores, online and throughout Wilmington.*

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A Grandee Visits a Grande Dame

Spencer Compton explores the legendary Carolina Apartments

When I was in short breeches, my most elegant mother, Mary Noel, liked to bend an old saying: "Curiosity skills the cat," she would say, encouraging me to explore the world around me, even if I soiled my silken blouse or bloodied my busy knees.

Indeed, I developed a hunger for how things work and connect, from the Archimedes screw pump that filled the moat around our Compton Wynyates estate to who was screwing whom in the highest reaches of British government.

While my contemporaries in Parliament considered I, Lord Wilmington, to be a dullard and a fop, many of the realm's deepest secrets and machinations were at my polished fingertips. (Which is why I became prime minister of Great Britain in 1742.) My lifelong inquisitiveness (some spelled it meddling) has served me well in my current explorations of this city, named for me by my protege, Royal Gov. Gabriel Johnston, once the grandest man in this land.

Which is why I recently found myself, flashlight in hand, exploring the very bowels of the Carolina Apartments, the oldest and most singular of the town's high-rise habitations. It is one said to be haunted by ghosts and certainly the memory of Wilmington's most famous and flamboyant artist, Claude Howell.

"This is where I come hunting for ghosts," said my guide, sixth-floor penthouse resident Donald Parham, a compact, well-maned Beethoven lookalike who also wielded a flashlight to penetrate the gloom. (He had left his ghost-busting, shriek-producing lightsword in his apartment, where he has better luck seeing the Carolina Apartments' famous spirits.)

Pipes dripped in this subterranean maze that twisted hither and yon at the corner of Fifth and Market streets. *Ahhh*. There's the dumbwaiter born 112 years ago, parked brokenly at the bottom of its pit as if it had plunged to its own death. Around the corner at the bottom of a seemingly forgotten shaft is the original elevator car with its distinctive swing-arm controller built by Moffatt Manufacturing of Charlotte, which launched its elevator business at the time the Carolina Apartments were built in 1906 and 1907, I learned. I'd wager it was the first electric passenger elevator car in the city.

There are the bins that once held coal. And beside them, the original Gurney 1130 boilers from Toronto that formerly fed steam throughout the massive masonry building. They remain fantastically imposing, lined up with their mouths hanging open like hungry iron mastiffs from hell. In the winter, my guide explained, the upstairs apartments would be so hot all the top floor windows would be open.

"The architect must've been drunk," I couldn't help but muse while trying to get the feel of the footprint of this most unusual creation. It seemed to wind underground well beyond the borders of its upstairs structure, perhaps under Market Street or even the neighboring Kenan Memorial Fountain. (Looking up the building's history in the fabulous research room at the city library — complete with my signed portrait! — I learned the architect, Robert Louis Sharpe, was part of the team that designed the New York Stock Exchange.)

During my thorough tour from the basement to the roof, I marveled at how one structure could be so thoroughly befuddling — and interesting! Two staircases — one cramped and spiraled for the help — practically hold hands as they climb through the floors. An almost-ancient, wood-walled Otis elevator — the successor to the ghostly one in the basement — trundles creakingly up and down the building near the double-barreled staircases, across from the since-removed freight elevator that was once busy hauling ice, pianos and furniture, and close to the metal outdoor staircase that mate the two halves of the building. This means there were five avenues for vertical conveyance in this Flemish bond brick behemoth, not to mention the original wooden fire escape ladders. (Despite this plethora, more than a few people have leapt to their deaths here.)

Apartments stagger from room to room, each saying something different. Doors open to other doors or to floorless balconies with metal railings that look as if they've been on the ocean floor for generations. High-ceilinged hallways are narrow and long, as if they were stretched out and up by some capricious hand.

All of which means . . . there is magic here!

"There's a whole different vibe," said Primus Robinson from his suite on the sixth floor. "I wouldn't live anywhere else." If anyone can define "vibe," it would be this man. Mr. Robinson, 71, is the president of the Cape Fear Jazz Society and a former disc jockey. His narrow entry hall is lined with gold and silver records he earned while running the R&B, jazz and jazz fusion arms of big record labels like Atlantic and Elektra in New York and Philadelphia.

I found him to be a man after my heart, with a noble brow shielding a large, well-used cerebrum. His voice seems to harmonize with his colorful decorations, stacks of diverse books (his dog-eared and fat *Oxford Companion to Jazz* looks like a pastor's Bible) and, of course, the beautiful views from his windows.

I felt myself sinking into his couch and truly feeling the spirit of this building. It really is, as neighbor Donald Parham said, like living in the past. "I like old buildings, architecturally interesting places," said the well-named Primus Robinson. "And this place is interesting. I feel

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content here." What about ghosts ? (After all, the Carolina Apartments are on the city's ghost tour. "I'd welcome it, but I haven't seen it," he says.

But he said he likes to imagine the presence of "the great Claude Howell" permeating the building. Ahhh, Claude Howell . . . I have heard so much about this wondrous artist, printmaker, colorist, teacher, globetrotter and irrepressible character since my arrival here. And people said I was odd!

There was Claude Howell — who was born and died in this building — standing strip stark naked on his sixth-floor balcony, so often that the horse-carriage tour guide had to look up and check before pointing out the historic building to passengers.

In your modern vernacular, he had balls!

There was Claude Howell (1915-1997), brightly gay, with his perpetual scotch and cigarette and cucumber sandwiches made by his mother and suite-mate. A master of costumes and his own style, he started Wilmington College's (UNCW) art school even without a degree (he worked as a stenographer for the Atlantic Coast railroad) and would make his students paint small squares of paper to master the nuances of color, for which he was renowned.

His fame bloomed at the 1964 New York World's Fair, and he became the first North Carolina artist to be shown at the Metropolitan Museum of Art.

Claude Howell famously brought to the world the beauty and character of coastal Carolina and its people. He also kept a fungus plant in his apartment closet that he would extract liquid from to restore health and vitality. Simply smashing, this fellow! He would've been welcomed at London's Kit-Cat Club, where only the grandest humans (ahem) were allowed.

Checking the city directories at the library, I learned there have been a wide variety of people who have lived at this sprawling structure with its 12-bay facades, uncanny stone balustrade, scroll brackets and, in the beginning, wrought-iron carriage lanterns. A century ago it housed minor railroad executives and train masters, an eye specialist, the owner of a book and stationery store, a cotton mill vice president, the assistant manager of the Schloss Theater, the co-owner of a dry goods store, the

manager of Eureka Dye Works, two traveling salesmen, and assorted widows or daughters of the well-to-do, among many others. The apartments range in size from 800 square feet and up and currently rent for roughly a dollar per square foot.

As my new long-haired friend Donald Parham (he had attended the original Woodstock music festival as a 15-year-old) squired me around the building, we met some of the current residents, who remain a quite diverse lot in terms of age and color, more than a few sharing their flats with canine companions. "This place is not for everyone," one said as he led his hound to the larger stairwell because he finds the elevator slow and uncertain. Indeed, if your tastes run to gleam, straight edges, modern kitchens and big open windows, you've clearly made a wrong turn.

But if you don't mind a few cracks and creaks and hunger for vintage character and "vibe," you'll find a home here.

Filmmakers have loved to use it for their movies, from the 1986 classic *Blue Velvet* to the independent film Uncle Frank, filmed here in May about a character somewhat like Claude Howell.

Our tour ended on the roof with one of the most fabulous views in all of Wilmington. I stood marveling, imagining what it was like in 1905, before all the high-rise hotels and riverfront development. The antique masonry coping is unlike any I've ever seen or imagined. And up here you can clearly see why the structure seems so baffling below: It's actually two separate buildings connected on one side by the stairwells and elevator shaft, and on the other by an uncanny arched parapet wall that feels like a section of an ancient Roman aqueduct, or part of our old family manse in Warwickshire, England.

That the wall hasn't shifted or toppled over the years testifies to the quality of its engineering and construction. It's a lovely, scruffy and curious place. If I wasn't so happy in my Queen Street digs, I would certainly seek a residence here. My new bell bottoms with brocade trim and emerald silk shirt would be right at home here.

But don't tell my mother. Despite her advice to explore, the always impeccable Mary Noel Compton would be mortified by these Carolina Apartments. – *Spencer Compton*

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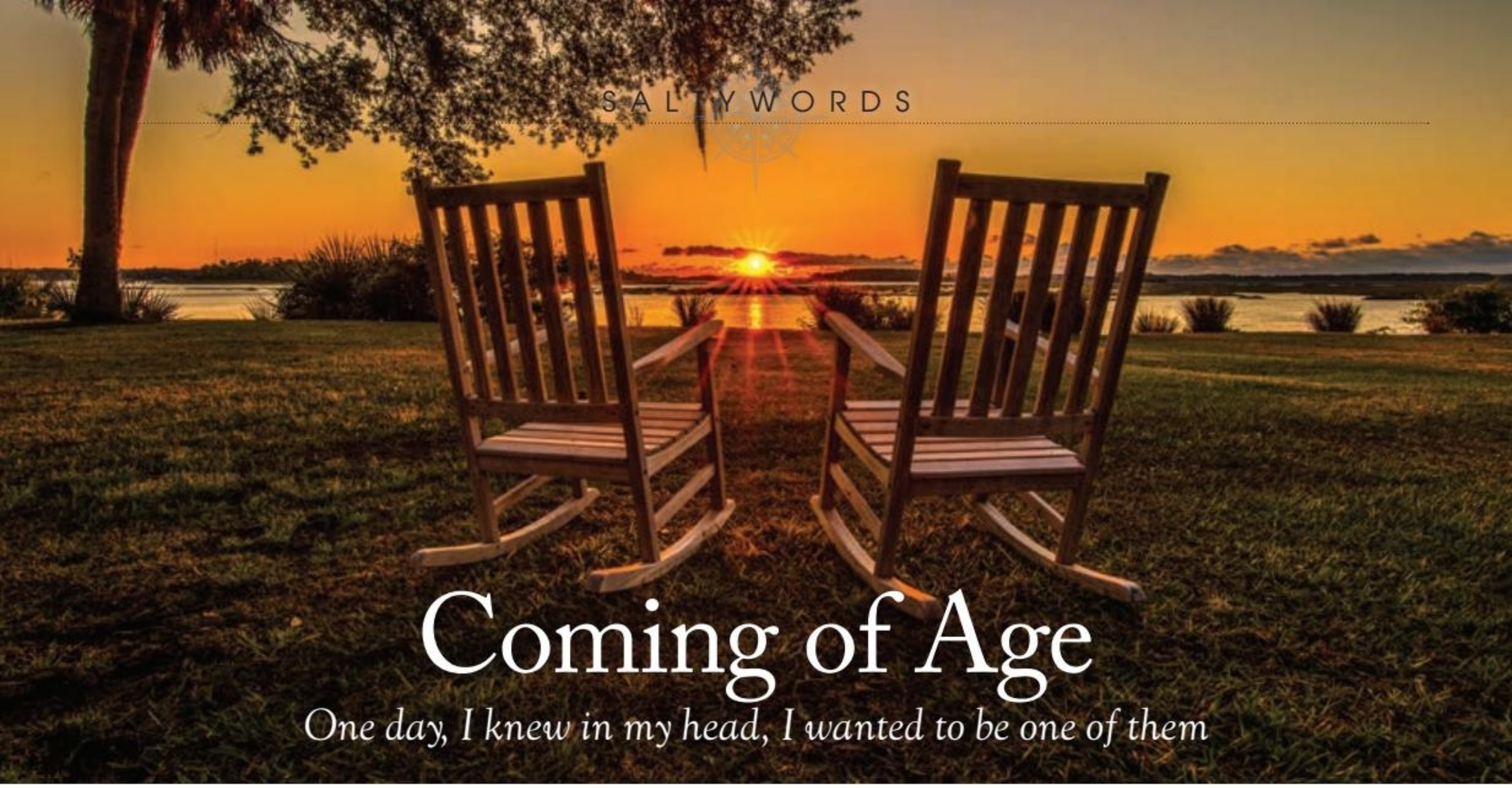

Coming of Age

One day, I knew in my head, I wanted to be one of them

By Billy Hirschen

I can still feel the knot in the pit of my stomach when I noticed it for the first time. Arnie couldn't reach the counter where his food had been ever since we moved here to Wilmington. He'd been leaping the three feet from the floor to the countertop with the ease and grace of a dancer, leaving Emma, his chunkier feline partner, both envious and admiring.

But it wasn't until it happened a second time, in a different venue — this time a shelf in the hallway closet, when he fell backward and landed with a thud — that I truly realized how old he was getting. After years of easily lofting himself to wherever his target might be — a countertop, a closet shelf or any number of destinations that drew his attention — he could no longer assume a smooth landing.

Watching him walk away in recognition of his failing, his head held high, I could sense him gracefully making the adjustment from what he used to be able to do to what he couldn't do anymore. I couldn't help projecting myself into his world. Just like Arnie, I'm aging too.

Call me crazy, but there's a big part of me that's enjoying getting older. Every year, I seem to get a little more comfortable with myself, more appreciative of the effort it's taken to get to where I am today, more forgiving of the choices I made that turned out differently from what I had hoped for myself at the time. I find comfort in the wisdom that I've gained through the years, wisdom that nourishes me in spite of mistakes made. In short, I'm experiencing aging as a great healing, an opportunity to incorporate all I've learned into the choices that I make for myself every day.

It's unbelievable to be turning 70, which will be happening in a few short, precious months. Who turns 70? Our parents? OK. Our grandparents? For sure. But us? Me?

I've always been aware of getting older, but it didn't occur to me until a year or so after I had both of my hips replaced that I was actually *aging*. Unlike the broken ankle I sustained in my early 20s after a clumsy move on the basketball court, I didn't bounce back right away from the surgery on my arthritic hips. The ankle never bothered me again, but after the hip replacement, I gradually began realizing that things weren't ever going to be the same anymore. Gardening and landscaping, lifelong pleasures of mine, were becoming more of a chore than a pleasure, with all the bending and kneeling. Those once graceful movements on the dance floor were no longer quite so graceful, and my magic moments climbing in the mountains were increasingly giving way to the comforts of going to the beach.

At first I thought the surgery may have been flawed, but I was assured by my surgeon, and reassured by second and third opinions, that the surgery was fine; it was my age. The symptoms, I was told, were age-appropriate and no fault of the surgery. Welcome to the golden years, I could almost hear them telling me.

Occasionally someone will tell me that I look younger than I am, and that's always nice to hear. But frankly, I'm more impressed with someone my age who combines a fair amount of physical agility with a graceful approach to aging. That is the way I try to live my life these days, with a high regard for having reached my age, with gratitude and a sense of enthusiasm and possibility no less vibrant and spirited than in the '60s, when I was coming of age.

Maybe that's the reason, when I retired, I started taking dancing and guitar lessons. Maybe that's the reason I took my motorcycle

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across the country and moved from New York to Wilmington. Maybe that's the reason I would still like to be in the right relationship with someone again. I still have desires today that are no less meaningful to me than when I was younger. Like a flower seeking the light, I still have dreams that may be smaller in scope but not irrepressible. That's the ticket: desire; keeping it alive and well.

And here's the thing: I always knew that I would enjoy being an older person. How I've admired the older folks I've met through the years. They were kind and understanding when I was growing up. A few of them were the angels who appeared at critical times offering the support I needed, and others became the wise elders who taught me things about life I didn't learn growing up with family and friends. For whatever reason, I was always able to relate better to them than to my own contemporaries. One day, I knew in my heart, I wanted to be one of them. And now, lo and behold, I am.

This attitude of mine probably grew out of several experiences that were part of my formative years. When I was about 12 years old, a bedridden woman and her severely handicapped husband were neighbors of ours — Mr. and Mrs. Biskin. Somehow, I was the one who ended up going over to their home every morning before school to help Mr. Biskin get dressed: socks, shirt, pants and everything else he needed to ready himself for the day. In some way, the compassion I developed for this man and his long-suffering wife outweighed the complaints and discomfort I had at the time about doing this.

I must confess, however, not that I enjoyed the task, but that it harbored in me an appreciation for older folks and the process of aging. I grew up with essentially no grandparents; three of them died in the Holocaust, and the one surviving grandfather never learned English, lived hundreds of miles away, and barely knew who I was. I never got to experience that special kind of love and devotion that emanates from an older version of one's parents. Helping my elderly neighbor put on his underwear wasn't exactly the relationship I was looking for, but it provided me with the experience of having been appreciated by a kind, vulnerable and older human being.

I see much possibility in the days ahead. It's taken me a long time, but I've come to know that the person whose opinion I cherish most now is mine. That's not been the way I've lived my life. I wasn't taught it and I didn't learn it, until recently. I learned it as a result of experiencing life, embracing my mistakes and treasuring the moments when I got it right. Life, living, taught me this. Aging, which gets a bad rap in our culture, taught me this.

No one lives forever. That's why I live my life as I do, like a loose garment that one day will have to be shed. But I'll be damned if I'm going to miss out on the wonders of conscious aging. My best teachers haven't been the educators and the mentors I've had along the way. No, my best teachers have been the experiences of my life and the lessons they've taught me — to embrace and honor myself and my process.

By golly, if Arnie can hold this head high as each day passes, so can I.

Billy Hirschen is a retired educator and was the 1984-85 New York State Teacher of the Year. He has lived in Wilmington since 2016.

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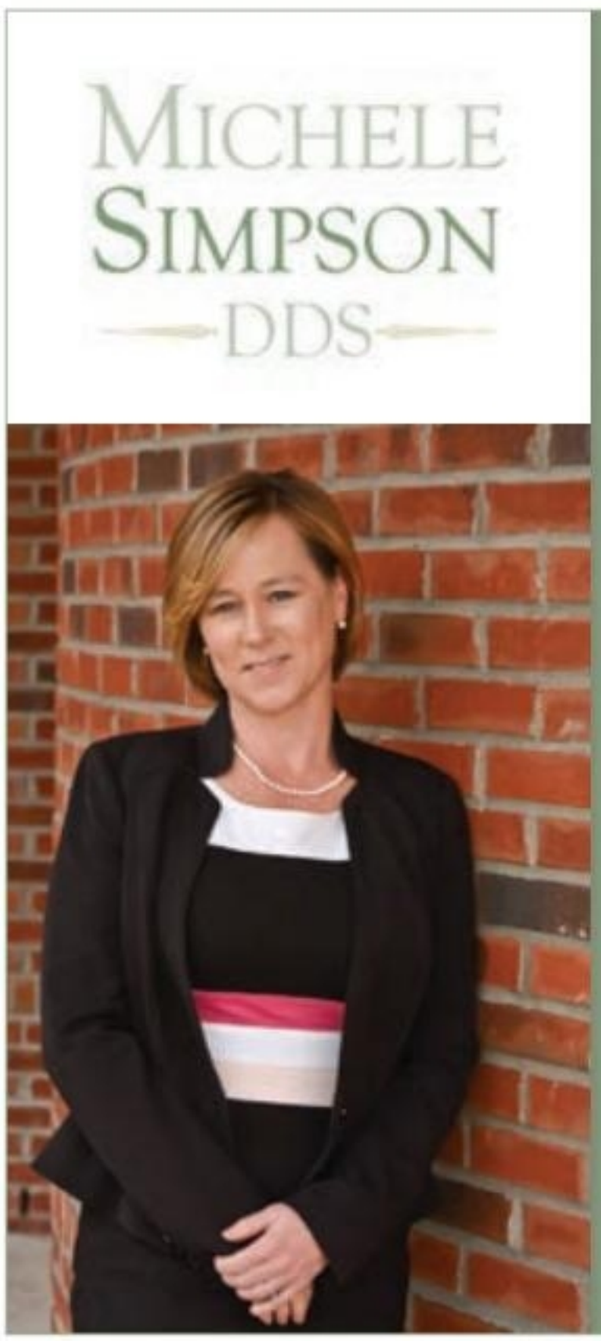

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Ruby-Throated Hummingbird

Beauty on the wing

By Susan Campbell

The true herald of spring along the Carolina coast might well be the first male ruby-throated hummingbird, which appears in early April. No other birds compare to these tiny dynamos when it comes to brilliant plumage, attitude and playful antics. Their welcome return from their wintering grounds — as far south as Costa Rica — signals that warm days and an abundance of flowering plants are just around the corner. But it is not until midsummer that these winged jewels really make their presence known.

The ruby-throated is the only species of hummingbird that breeds east of the Appalachians. It is commonly found from late March through early October in our area, but can be spotted in a variety of habitats from the mountains to the coast. Males — who are easy to spot because of their iridescent ruby-red throat patches (called gorgets) — return to set up territories about two weeks ahead of females, often utilizing the same spot in successive summers. A significant percentage of ruby-throated adults breed within their natal area. Although generations may utilize the same general neighborhood, they are solitary creatures. Females, cryptically colored with iridescent green and white plumage, rear the young alone. The task requires approximately six weeks of work at the nest, tending the eggs and then the nestlings, until they are independent. Two young hummingbirds are typically produced from tiny white eggs the size of black-eyed peas. It is not unusual for females to produce two sets of young per season in the Carolinas.

In our area, the first young ruby-throateds begin to leave the nest by early June. The immature males lack the bright gorgets of their fathers, looking far more like their mothers until late winter. But they are very feisty little birds. They seem ready to antagonize each other from the minute they leave the nest, and will commonly pick fights with adults as well as larger species of birds, if they feel so inclined.

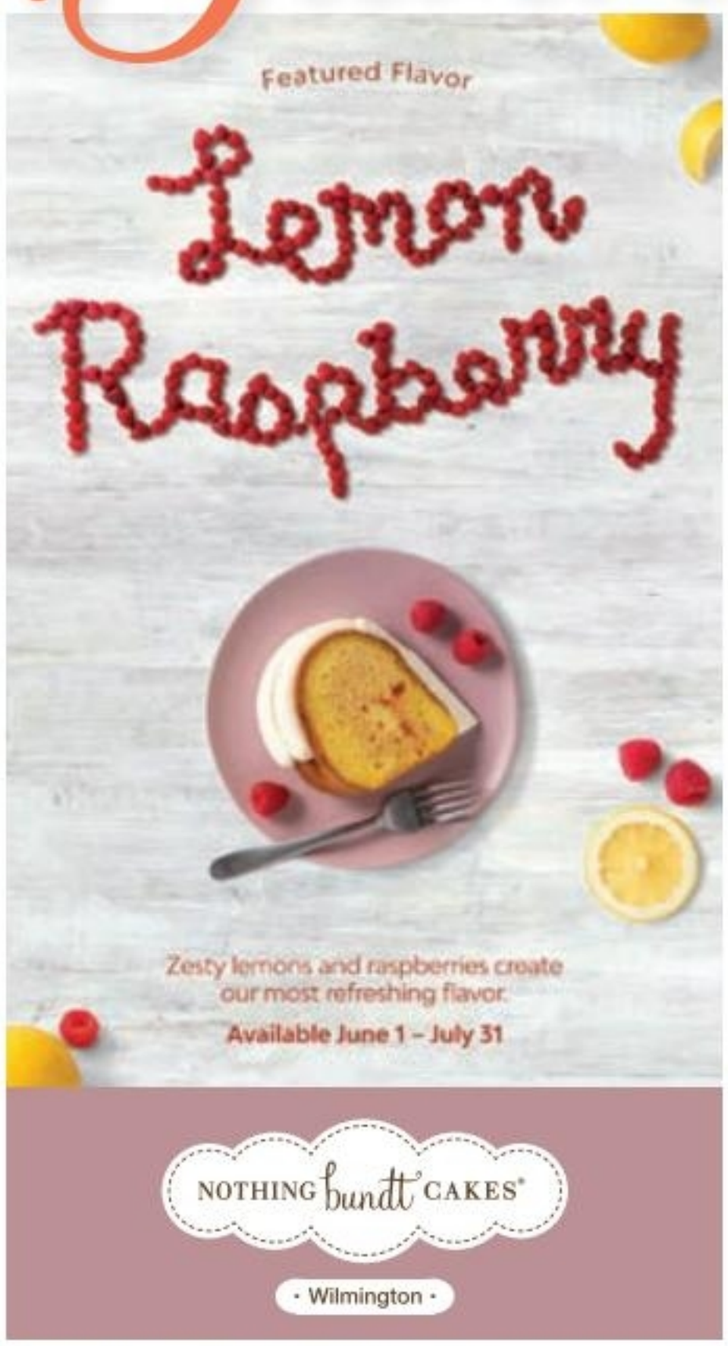
Female ruby-throateds can be just as aggressive as males if they so choose. Given that they are actually 20 percent larger in size, they have the advantage when a conflict arises.

The hummingbird's way of life requires a high-energy diet. Flight speeds upward of 50 miles per hour are not uncommon. Therefore they must consume a good amount of protein per day, which they find in tiny insects, spiders and mites. Ruby-throateds actually spend most of their time foraging in thick vegetation, scouring leaves and stems for a variety of arthropods. Invariably some prey items are swallowed with the nectar from the brightly colored blooms they visit. So a high-quality hummingbird habitat includes not only a variety of colorful plants with tubular blooms, but also a minimal use of pesticides to ensure good insect diversity.

Now is the time to hang a sugar-water feeder to attract the attention of local ruby-throateds, if you have not already done so. Place the feeder where it can be easily seen and enjoyed. And the more feeders you add, the more hummingbirds you will attract. Just be sure to clean and refill the feeders regularly. When daytime temperatures climb above 70 degrees, they will require attention every three to five days or the solution will begin to ferment. Simply empty, scrub with hot water and a bottle brush and then refill. Detergents should be avoided since they often leave residue on the plastic portions of the feeder, which the birds can detect. Use of a 10 percent bleach solution may be necessary. Just be sure to thoroughly rinse and dry all feeders before they are replaced.

Susan would love to receive your wildlife sightings and photos. She can be contacted at susan@ncaves.com.

Summer LOCAL FAVORITES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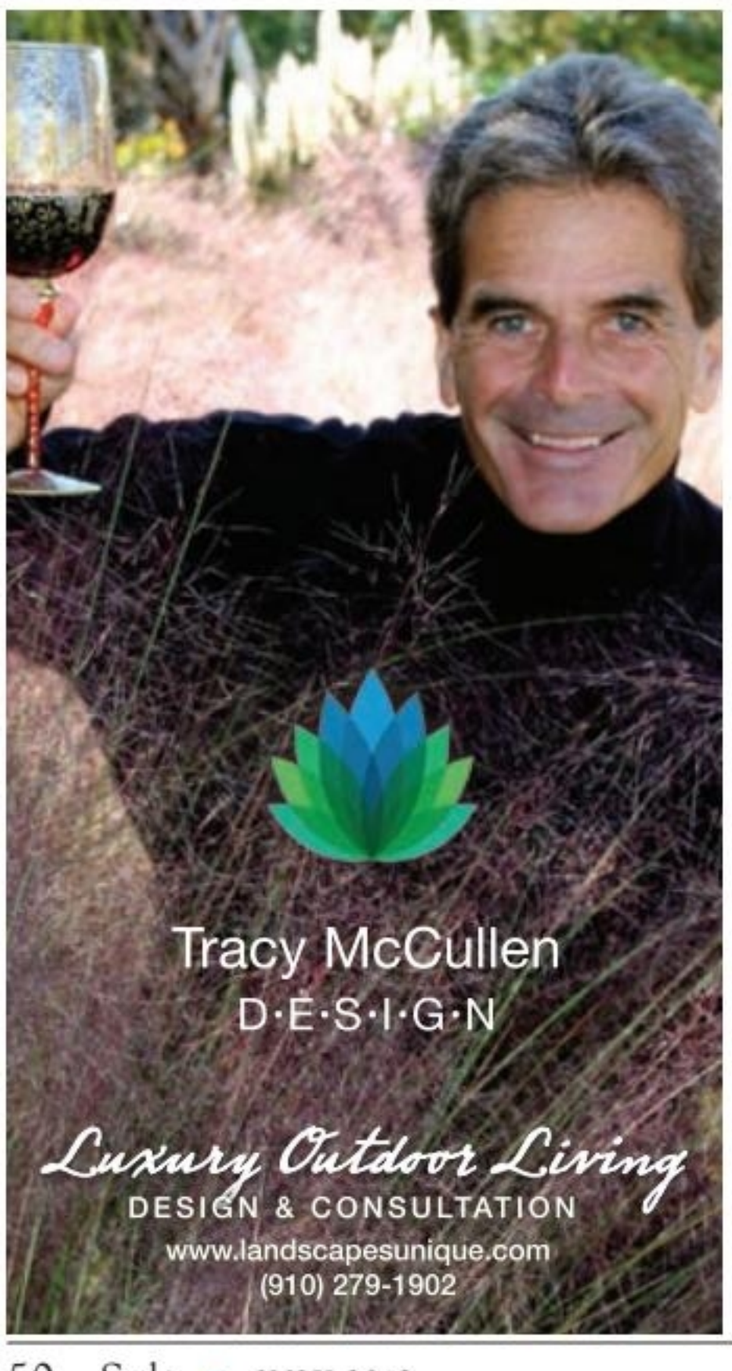

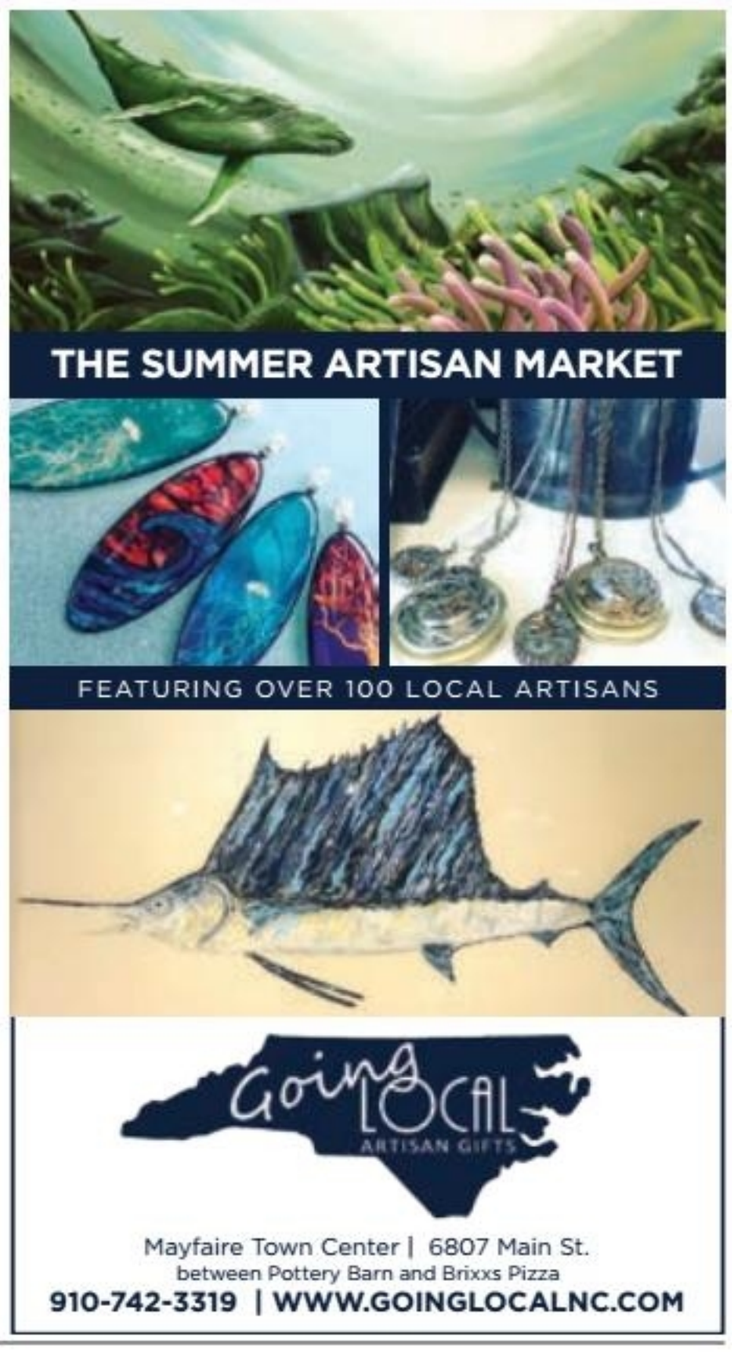
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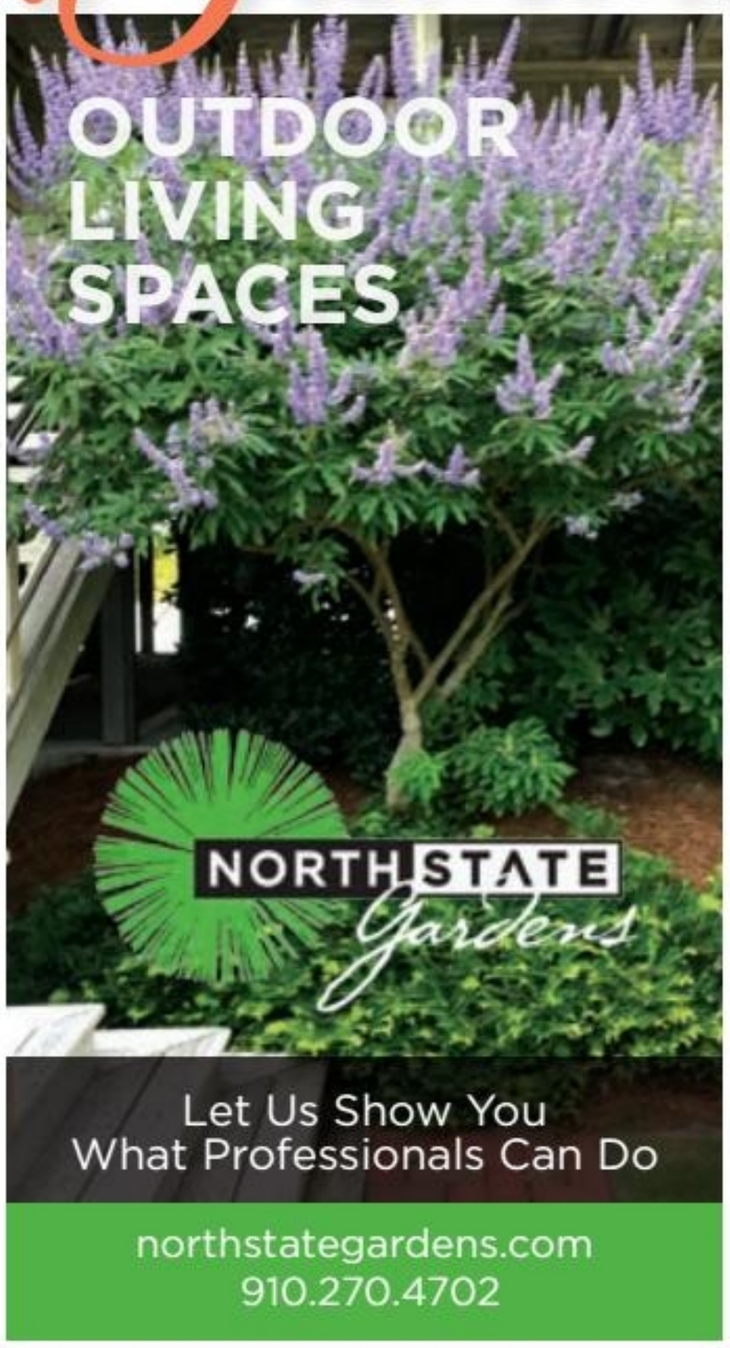

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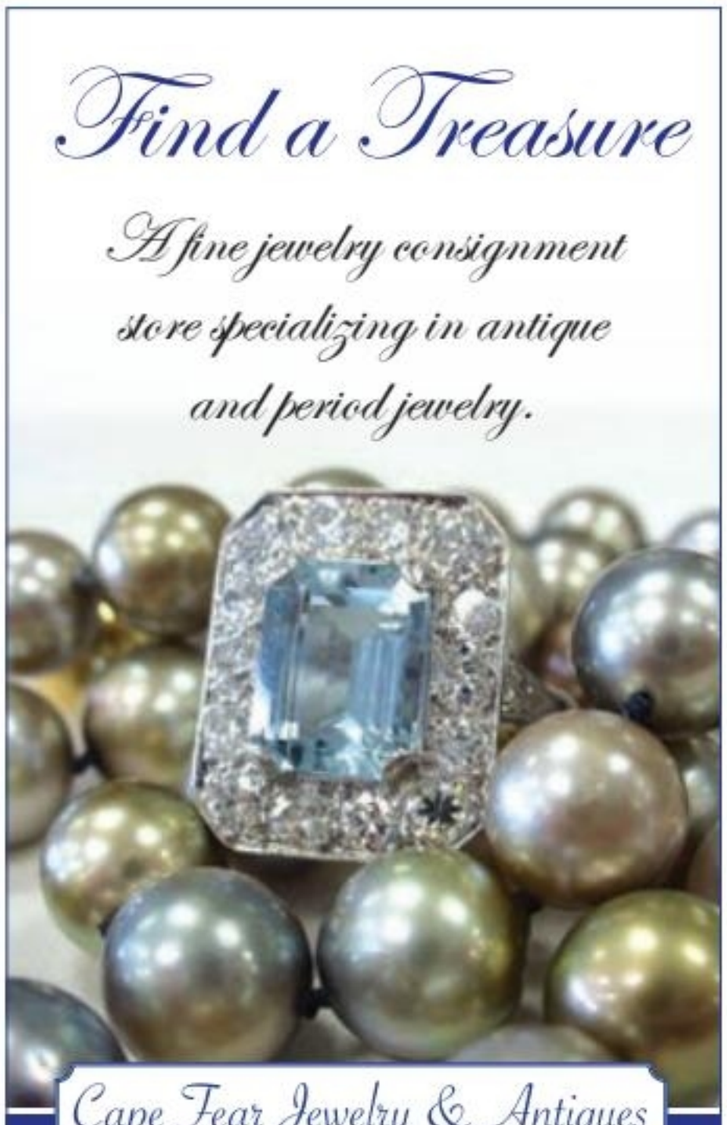

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Pulling Up the Wild Blackberry Bushes

seems ungrateful but they're too plentiful
crowding the precious patch of sun
meant for the Heritage Red Raspberry
that cost $16.

So it's a matter of hubris that we jerk up
those lesser cousins before they bloom
drag them over nubile grass and
toss their torn briars into fire.

Yet when I get to the last bush, I stop
remember how in August I needed
more fruit to nestle around the scant
peaches in my cobbler.

The berries were small but their juice
tasted of mulled wine, piquant but
not too tart, the grace note of a last-minute
potluck, others cooed for the recipe.

So I lay aside the shovel, knowing that
this last bush, cane too tender for thorns,
might one day be our savior
if the raspberry turns to dust.

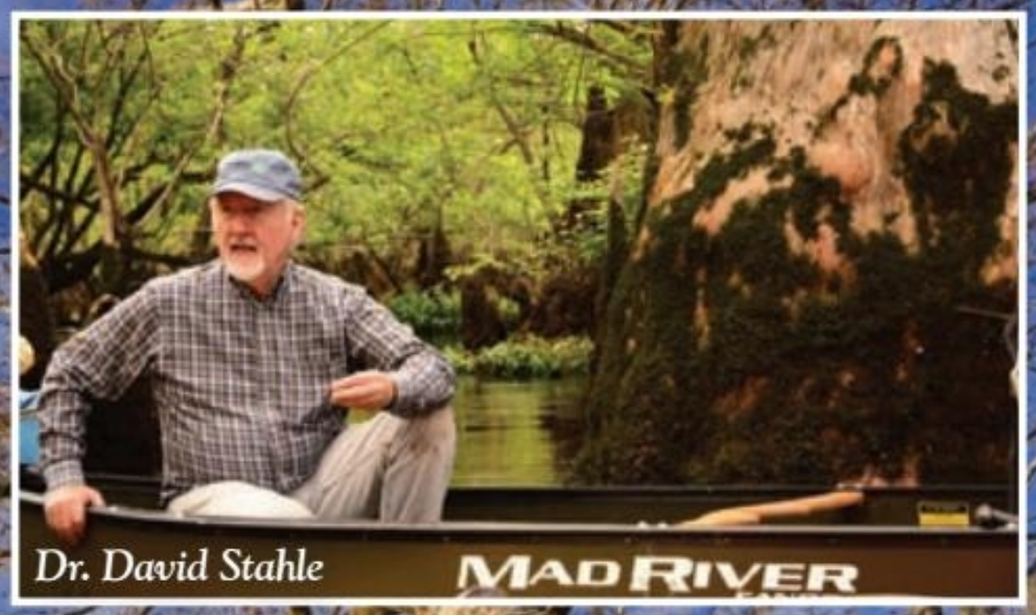
– Ashley Memory

Tree People

The 40-year journey to protect North Carolina's ancient cypress forest

By Virginia Holman

Photographs By Dan Griffin & Charlie Peek


Dr. David Stahle MAD RIVER

Julie Moore

Angie Carl

The Old Forest

On May 9, 2019, in the rural floodplain hamlet of Ivanhoe, North Carolina, 12 members of the media gathered with conservationists at the bottom of a steep, soft sand driveway thick with coppery pine straw and spent catkins. There, beside the banks of a slow-moving blackwater swamp, esteemed dendrochronologist Dr. David Stahle, conservationist Julie Moore, and Angie Carl of the Nature Conservancy stood silent as a small congregation of writers and reporters prepared our recording devices and cameras.

Sunlight filtered through the brim of Julie Moore's straw hat and spangled her cheeks. Dr. Stahle stood stalwart. He took a few deep breaths and swayed gently as he shifted his weight from foot to foot. Angie Carl caught his eye, and they exchanged a wistful glance, the kind that passes between in-laws at a wedding. She reached out and briefly rested a hand on his shoulder. We quieted soon after.

The purpose of this gathering was the formal announcement that we stood upriver of a 2,624-year-old living bald cypress tree, known in scientific circles as BLK227, now confirmed as the longest lived tree of its species known to exist and the fifth oldest known non-clonal tree species in the world.

It's always thrilling when an ancient relic is found, both for the discoverers and for the public. Last year, news outlets reported an 8-year-old girl in Sweden pulled a rusted ribbon of metal from a lake bottom, raised it above her head like Excalibur and called to her father on shore. Her find? A pre-Viking sword that dates to the 5th century. A few months later, a Greek trading ship, dubbed the "Odysseus ship" because it is similar to the one depicted on the famous "Siren vase," was found perfectly preserved, mast intact, 2,400 years after it sank to the anoxic bottom of the Black Sea. Such finds capture the minds of scientists and laypeople alike. They offer a keyhole glimpse of lost civilizations and lead us to wonder about those who created them.

Then there is a find like BLK227. This living tree is neither artifact nor relic, museum piece or monument. To think of a single tree as something separate from its forest risks false idolatry. Today, this almost incomprehensibly ancient bald cypress not only flourishes, it does so within a plant community full of ancient trees. These "multi-millennium old trees," Stahle says, "stand cheek to jowl" throughout this wilderness. Heart rot has left many "so hollow, you can step inside, look straight up and see to heaven." He estimates these elders at over 3,000 years. Within the context of so vast a measure of time, the works of humans may seem a folly, yet this old forest has endured the last few centuries both despite and because of us.

The River

The headwaters of the Black River rise with the confluence of the Great Coharie and Six Runs creeks. A long, mazy meander of a river, it slackens and constricts, pulses and flows the whole of its 66 miles. Below Ivanhoe, the Black absorbs its glade-like tributary, the South River. It surrenders its name and unites with the Cape Fear River 14 miles above Wilmington. According to historian Wilson Angley, in his *Historical Overview of the Black River in Southeastern North Carolina*: "In the early decades of the eighteenth century, the Black River was sometimes referred to as the Stumpy River, doubtless because of its numerous impediments to navigation." A 1733 rendering of the "New and Correct" North Carolina map by Edward Moseley housed at East Carolina University lists this alternate name as the "Swampy River." Both names are apt, for the areas where the cypress forest remains are both stumpy and swampy. There are other hazards as well. In places like the Three Sisters Swamp, thickets of cypress knees, partially submerged snags, sandbars, and interminable swaths of alligator weed can mean a long, hot, muddy portage during periods of low water. Venomous and nonvenomous snakes drop in the water from low-hanging branches and sometimes coil atop the cypress knees. The most insidious peril is one that befalls even the most seasoned local: they become utterly lost.

One somewhat mythic account, first published by renowned botanist Steven Leonard in the Fall 1985 *North Carolina Wildflower Preservation Society Newsletter*, recounts a story often told by Haws Bluff native Leon Horrell, a man who lived and worked much of his life near a Black River swamp. It's described as a "secretive, mysterious, inaccessible place where the muck is too fluid to walk upon and too solid to boat through at low water, and when the river floods, the forest becomes myriad inter-connecting passage-ways." Horrell spent a month each year on the Black River. From "Thanksgiving until Christmas Eve he pulls, poles, and paddles two tiny wooden boats into the labyrinth of sloughs and coves" to gather mistletoe. One day, Horrell sees an area of the swamp unfamiliar to him. He ties the towboat to a tree and enters. There he encounters "giant gnarled and buttressed cypress trees," but when he tries to retrace his path back to the place he hitched the towboat full of mistletoe, he becomes disoriented. "He paddled methodically, carefully, searching for an elusive water path where everything would fit together as he pictured it in his mind. But nothing matched." This "man of the swamp" manages to return home, but despite "countless trips," his boat full of mistletoe is never found. Even today, large groups of paddlers routinely get separated and turned around in the swamps.

The Black River is a trickster; it winds through wilderness, and landmarks shift with the water level. A slough you paddle through one week may become a white sand island the next. Navigating these areas today is nearly impossible in anything other than a kayak or

canoe, yet less than a century ago, the river was a bustling hub of commerce. Its heyday was between 1870 and 1924, a period when steamboats regularly made the trip between Wilmington and the small town of Clear Run. Steamers ferried barrels of tar, pitch, and turpentine — naval stores made from the extensive longleaf pine forests that once lay upland of the river–as well as loads of cypress. During this period, tugs, rafts, and shallow draft steamers needed unimpeded paths to ferry their cargoes. Dredging below the headwaters near Clear Run and extensive "river maintenance" was performed. Wilson Angley notes that in 1912 some "5,674 obstructions" were removed. Even so, he notes that boiler explosions, fires, and snags caused seven steamers and countless rafts to wreck on the river.

Why were ancient cypress trees like BLK227 spared the blade? There's no single reason. Dr. Stahle says that the old trees likely were deemed "low-grade yellow cypress. Red cypress, on the other hand, was so desirable, you can barely find a stick of it now." Also, the older a tree gets, the more "it gets shook," as the saying goes. According to Hervey McIver of the Nature Conservancy, senescent cypress trees often "develop shakes or deep vertical splits along the grain." When a tree like this is felled, McIver says, "the wood shatters," rendering it useless for most commercial purposes. Finally, by the end of World War I, Wilson Angley notes that "steamboating in the lower Cape Fear region in general entered a rapid decline" due to the rise of reliable railways and roads and commercial destruction of the longleaf forest. The last steamboat on the Black was the *Charles Whitlock*, retired in 1926. Over the next 60 years, the naval stores industry faded, and the Black became known for its hunting and fishing.

The Trees

Julie Moore was the first person to direct Dr. Stahle to the ancient cypress swamp. "The first time I was on this river was in 1980. It was late one evening, and a forester who I knew [the late Dan Gilbert] contacted me because he wanted me to see an old forest that he was fascinated by — and considering that he cut down a lot of trees, it was interesting that he wanted me to see this site." At the time, Moore worked for the state's Natural Heritage Program, which cataloged important plant species across the state. She and Gilbert drove down as far as they could along the riverbank until Moore was able to see the edge of an ancient cypress forest. Then they got out and began walking. "We walked down as close to the river as we could to watch the wood ducks come in — they nested in the hollows of the cypress trees," says Moore. "He didn't say a word for about fifteen minutes; we just stood there. I'm getting goose bumps right now just thinking about it. It was one of those times that you know someone is sharing with you something that's very important to him or her, and as it turns out, it's a very important place."

"We had already started having contract workers [including botanist Steven Leonard] survey Bladen and Pender counties for unusual natural areas . . . But nobody had ever been on the edges of the river, so we began exploring," says Moore. Shortly after, Dr. Stahle wrote a letter to the Natural Heritage Program; he was looking for stands of old post oaks to study. Says Moore: "I picked up the phone, called him, and said, 'We don't have any of those post oaks you're interested in, but we do have some old cypress.'"

In the mid-1980s, with Moore's guidance, Stahle and a small team of scientists conducted extensive core sampling of several senescent cypress stands on the Black River. Moore says that ancient trees don't always look like we expect: "Ancient trees aren't always the tallest trees or the biggest trees." They have what Dr. Stahle calls, "the gnarl factor." Trees, like humans, grow gray and stooped, their limbs appear arthritic in very old age. So, Dr. Stahle and his team looked for trees with twisted, wrinkled gray trunks, heavy branches, small canopies and crowns that had the look of stag's horns. In addition, these trees had to be solid enough to sample. Tree ring dating requires a continuous core sample from a solid area of tree trunk. Scientists use an auger and a tool called a Swedish increment borer. This hand-operated tool,

which looks a bit like a giant corkscrew, is twisted at a precise angle with both hands from the exterior of the tree to its pith, gathering tree ring material into a long hollow tube that's the width of a pencil. Coring can be precarious; scientists often balance on a tall ladder wedged in the muck in order to access solid areas high above the trees' wide buttresses. Their research yielded exciting results. In 1987, Dr. Stahle was able to confirm existence of a tree nearly 1,700 years in age, BLK69, which soon became known locally as Methuselah.

The data obtained from core samples allows scientists to determine more than a tree's age. Dr. Stahle and I first met two years ago, and he told me then that "tree rings are formed each growing season; they are annual, and they encode the imprint of regional climate on the width of the ring. So that means you can cross-synchronize growth patterns back in time among hundreds of trees, or even thousands, in a given climate province to determine what was happening climatologically in a given year." Bald cypress, he said, are particularly sensitive and their rings provide exquisitely accurate historical information about periods of rain and drought. "The annual rain is a metric of tree growth for that year, and so the fat rings on bald cypress mean wet years and the skinny rings mean dry years. And the history of climate synchronizes growth in all the cypress trees in the Carolinas, they all show an annual rhythm of growth — good year, bad year — that cross-dates across the coastal plain. It is that imprint of climate variability that we in dendrochronology use to exactly synchronize the rings to the precise year in which they form." That level of precision allowed for one startling discovery.

In 1998, in what he self-deprecatingly refers to as a "particularly slow news day," *The New York Times* ran a front-page story about Stahle's latest research, which concerned one of the oldest mysteries in Colonial America. Using data gathered from ancient cypress samples he'd taken in the 1980s in Virginia and North Carolina, he discovered that when Sir Walter Raleigh's Roanoke colony was established — the Lost Colony — it coincided with an epic drought.

The New York Times wrote that Stahle's research, which was published in the journal *Science*, "showed that the most extreme three-year growing-season drought in 800 years coincided exactly with the period in which the Roanoke colony was established and then vanished. The worst single season occurred in 1587, the year of Virginia Dare's birth." Though the particulars of the colonists' fate will likely never be known, dendrochronology had shown that ancient bald cypress functioned as archivists, providing a detailed climate history, to quote poet Philip Larkin, "written down in rings of grain."

The World

The Nature Conservancy's Coastal Fire and Restoration Manager, Angie Carl, is concerned with the big picture — not only regarding the ancient trees but the health of their entire ecosystem. She first met Dr. Stahle in 2011, when he returned to Wilmington to give a talk and renew core-sampling the ancient cypress trees. Though she had managed the Black River Preserve since 2004, and knew the trees were ancient, it wasn't until her second day in the field with Dr. Stahle, a day that she describes as the "best day of my career," when she understood that this ancient forest was truly vast.

The first day, she, Dr. Stahle, graduate student Dan Griffin (now a professor at University of Minnesota) and experienced Black River guide Captain Charles Robbins ventured to area that contained numerous ancient trees, but it was the second day of the trip that both she and Dr. Stahle describe as astonishing. "We were near the area where BLK227 is located and we started exploring an area where he'd never been," she says. "At one point, he got out of the johnboat and started wading through the forest. Dr. Stahle kept saying, 'Angie! Angie! Angie! Count! Count! Count! 15, 18, 20!' We'd get out every 10 minutes and walk, and there

were hundreds, thousands, of ancient trees. He said, 'Those are all millennial-age trees. I didn't know it was this big.'"

Carl speaks of the ancient cypress trees in reverential tones, but she's quick to deflect attention from herself — conservation is a team effort. She's profoundly grateful to Dr. Stahle not only for his discoveries, but also for the renewed interest they've brought to preserving the area. She also credits Fred Annan and Hervey McIver with the Nature Conservancy, and Janice Allen with the Coastal Land Trust, all stalwart, experienced conservationists who have quilted together the extensive land acquisitions along the old forest. They've built meaningful relationships in the communities along the Black River, and have procured acreage and easements one hard-won parcel at a time. The result: The Nature Conservancy currently has 19,200 acres of land protected on the Black River, and the Coastal Land Trust has 2,000. Yet areas of the ancient cypress still remain on unprotected bottomland. Carl says the organization's goal is to get the funds to purchase not only those unprotected ancient cypress stands but also to purchase and restore adjacent longleaf systems. "It's not enough just to protect the ancient trees; to protect the forest, we need to protect the ecosystem. These areas are important to the health of the river, which is important to the health of the trees. We don't manage areas for a single species; we manage for an intact functioning ecosystem."

She points out that the Nature Conservancy appeals to people with diverse interests: "hunters, birdwatchers, people who fish, frog lovers, ancient tree lovers, people who care about air and water quality, people who care about bears, the prothonotary warblers or the red-cockaded woodpeckers. You might not like all of them, but odds are one of them is important to you."

Cape Fear Riverkeeper Kemp Burdette echoes Carl's call for a healthy river system: "Those swamps are a finely balanced ecosystem. Years ago, the Black River was considered one of the highest surface quality waterways in North Carolina." Burdette says his testing of the water quality two years ago after significant rain events revealed consistently elevated levels of fecal coliform bacteria he says are from the large-scale hog and chicken farms upriver. Fecal waste is essentially fertilizer, and its effects can quickly alter the river environment. "It can cause algal blooms that reduce the oxygen in the water, cause fish kills, disrupt bird and animal habitats, and threaten the health of humans who come into contact with contaminated water," says Burdette.

Conservation is a long game, a torch that's passed from generation to generation. Efforts like those on the Black River, which began 40 years ago with the efforts of people like Julie Moore, have only grown in importance through time as new discoveries are made and newer threats revealed. "I've been in this business since I was 24 years old," Moore told me a few days after our river trip, "and you have to be tough, because the conservation business is all about loss. For all the wonderful things that are happening right now on the Black River, there are hundreds of places that are gone — areas that I have personally known. That really does hurt, because we can't get them back."

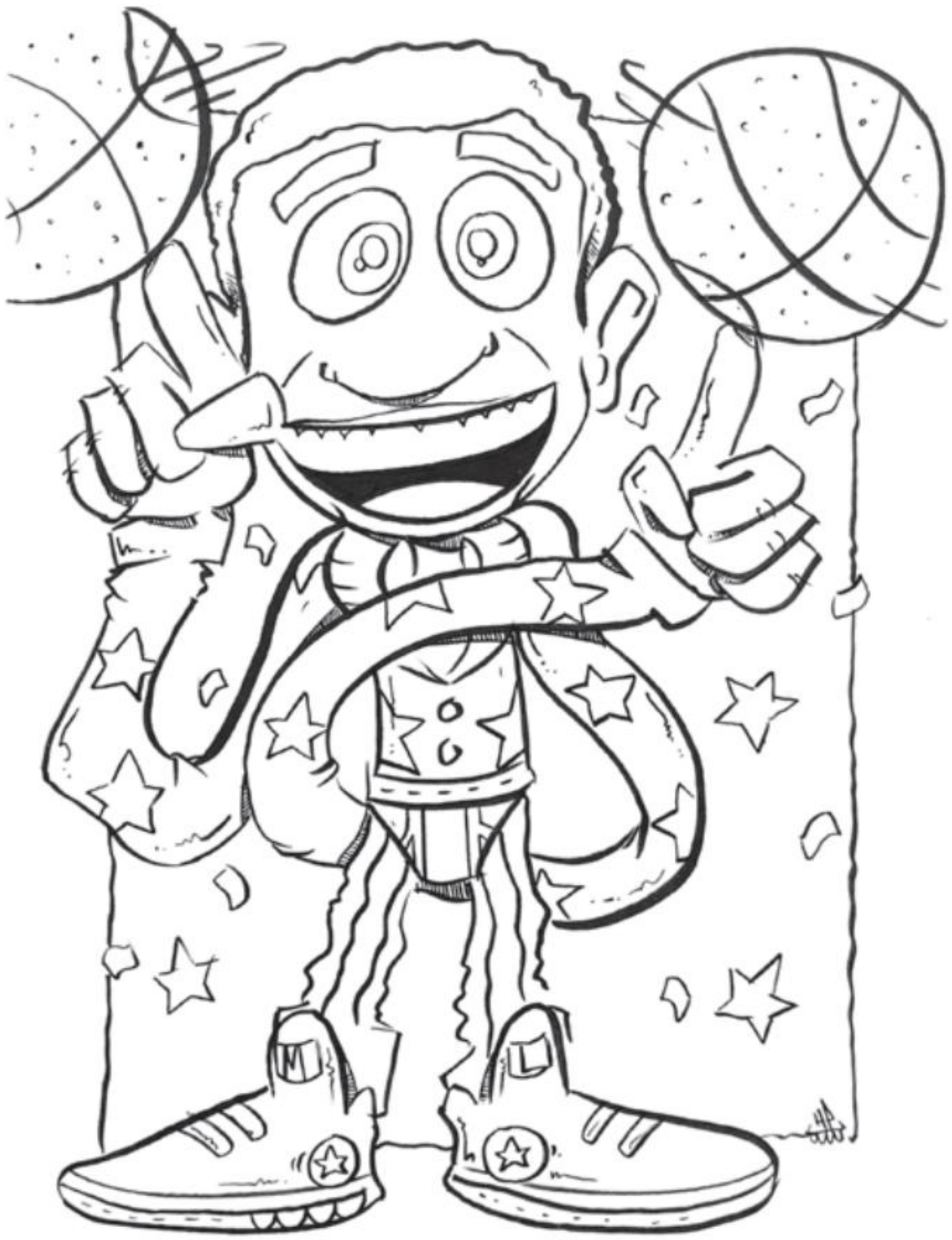
When I asked her why the ancient trees are important, she fell quiet for a bit. "Have you ever heard the saying, 'Trees hold the world together'? We have a moment to protect all of the ancient cypress on the Black River. People say things like, 'Oh, you can just replant trees,' but it's impossible to replant an ancient forest. Once it's gone, it's pretty much gone . . . Those ancient trees have endured so much trauma. So many have lost their crowns. Now think about the ancient tree we saw that day in the swamp, it had that little green sprig right there at water level. It has enough energy and determination to keep living. That bit of new growth, that's success."

Author and creative writing instructor Virginia Holman lives and writes in Carolina Beach.

THE WORLD ACCORDING TO HAJI P

The gifted artist and rapper who wants to make your next 30 seconds happy

By Kevin Maurer · Photographs By Andrew Sherman



Meadowlark Lemon

Greyson Davis is never without a pencil.

When you've got Hanna-Barbera in your head 24/7, not having something to capture that doodle rolling around your brain is worse than death. Plus, inspiration is fickle. "If it hits," Davis says, "I don't want to be without a tool."

Davis — who goes by Haji P (the "P" is for pajamas) — admits that he sees the world in cartoons, which makes him lucky because that is one fun way to see things.

We meet at the Port City Java on Front Street in late May. We'd met a few weeks before, but this was the first time I'd had a chance to sit and talk with him. The first thing you notice is the smile. It's bright and toothy. Dressed in jeans and a T-shirt, he has a blue Dodgers cap with the bill folded up pulled over his shoulder-length dreadlocks.

Tucked behind his ear is a pencil.

It's evening, and we forgo coffee for sodas. Between sips, he speaks in bursts, his mind ping-ponging from one idea to another, all delivered with a childlike excitement. "How do I turn that into a cartoon?" he says when I ask him about how he sees the world. "There is a cartoon in everything."

His ideas often start on a napkin or scrap of paper. Flipping through his work, it skews toward cartoons over more realistic comic book images. Much of it features pop culture icons from the '80s and '90s like G.I. Joe, the Thundercats and He-man. Edgar Allan Poe and Bert and Ernie from *Sesame Street* make appearances too. "I got Beetlejuice in my head last week," he says. "So, I went home and drew Beetlejuice."

But the twist is, each one has big front teeth, what Davis calls "Happyfangs." Some have a gold fang. Others have a heart on a fang. It started with a series of images of his favorite characters biting people's butts. He did it for one reason. "I thought it was hilarious," he says.

But after he illustrated a children's book, his fans — often families — wanted to buy his work. He first called the images "buttbiters," but changed the name to Happyfangs. His March art show at Wabi Sabi Warehouse in Wilmington used the same name.

Davis' latest project is a coloring book for Support the Port that celebrates Wilmington's rich African-American history. Cedric Harrison, the founder of Support the Port, a nonprofit that promotes culture in Wilmington, wanted to do the book because he never learned it in school. Harrison became aware of Wilmington's black history after he went to college. He didn't want the same thing to happen to younger generations. Harrison did the research for the book, but he needed a partner to bring the images to life. He pitched it to Davis.

"Haji is like, 'I just want to have fun and do cool things,'" says Harrison. Their goal was to create something engaging. "How could we put it in front of kids without forcing them to read?" says Harrison. "I figured the kids would get a kick out of the coloring."

But the book has a twist. The iconic figures are being portrayed as superheroes. So tennis star Althea Gibson isn't just holding a racket in her tennis whites. Nope. She's Wonder Woman. Meadowlark Lemon of Globetrotters fame has stretchy arms like Marvel Comic's Mr. Fantastic; and Dr. Foster Burnett — who established the city's first African-American community

Dr. Foster Burnett

hospital — is a magician a la Doctor Strange. "I want a 5-year-old to enjoy it," Davis says.

But both Davis and Harrison want the book to do more than entertain. Harrison says that in the past black business owners were idolized, but now only rappers and athletes get that respect. "I am trying to influence," Harrison says. "I wanted to highlight architects. Business leaders."

And it's not just black people whose minds they're trying to change.

"I wanted white people to see black people in a different eye," Harrison says. "I wanted to give them a different experience than what they get on the news."

Davis wanted to give back. The coloring book was a perfect opportunity.

"It makes me a contributing part of Wilmington," he says.

Davis started drawing as a kid, trying to mimic creations by puppet-maker Jim Henson and illustrator Charles Schulz. A natural storyteller, he migrated to music in high school. Soon, rap replaced sketching. And Haji P, the rapper, was born.

Davis grew up in Hawaii and Jersey City, before graduating from high school in Fayetteville. He attended UNCW, worked at Coast 97.3 FM and performed with Brown Co., a rap group named after a racial slur directed at him at a party. But in 2007, he left Wilmington for the Bay Area. He wanted a change. A new challenge. He hooked up with a hip-hop collective called Rec League in San Francisco.

Like his art, Davis' music — especially on his record *Neighborhood Kid* — was punctuated by sharp writing with a wry wit. Taking a cue from old school bands like De La Soul

and Tribe Called Quest, the songs are stories — a means to catalog his experiences. Davis told the *StarNews* in 2010 that he tried to make even his songs about dark topics "fun." "Some of my favorite rap is gun raps and tough guy raps," he told the newspaper. "But my daily life is just a fun adventure, so that's what I want to do in my raps."

Between gigs, he worked at the Boys and Girls Club in Santa Cruz. Despite having success as both a rapper and a counselor, something was missing. He wanted to go home to North Carolina. His grandfather was in Durham and he had family there, but settled on Wilmington because of his college days.

When his daughter was born in 2016, he went back to art. Drawing was something he could share with her. It was a skill he could give to her. "She deserves better," he says of art versus rap. "Drawing is more fun." Now, in some ways, he is drawing for an audience of one.

"She is the battery for absolutely everything," he says of his 3-year-old daughter, his smile getting bigger. "She is the largest part of everything I do. It can never happen without her."

Here in Wilmington, he has gone back to working with the Boys and Girls Club as well as teaching parenting classes to foster parents and working in a Boys and Girls foster home in Columbus County. But after leading an arts class for GLOW Academy, he was offered a job there as a teacher. He is about to finish his first year. Over the summer break, he plans to teach art camp at day care centers and draw characters out at the ballpark during Wilmington Sharks games.

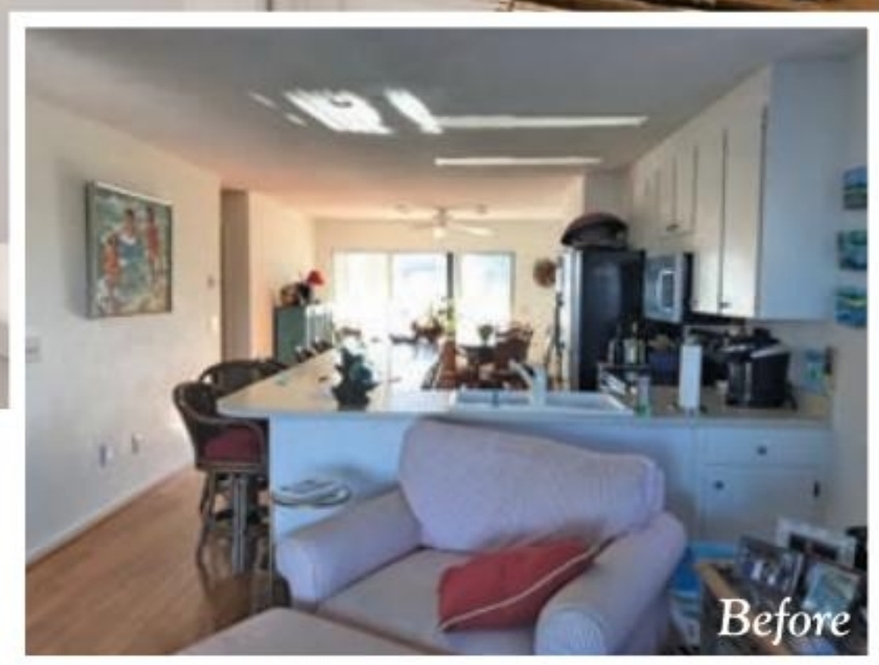
"How do you make 30 seconds better for not just you?" he says. "If this is my gift, I want to continue to serve. If I can contribute somehow, that is what the ultimate goal is."

Kevin Maurer is the author of nine books, including No Easy Day: The Firsthand Account of the Mission That Killed Osama Bin Laden. *He lives in Wilmington.*

Before and After

A summer house at Wrightsville Beach overlooking Banks Channel gets a stylish makeover from designer Liz Carroll

By William Irvine · Photographs By Rick Ricozzi


Before

There is a special group of Wilmingtonians who are lucky enough to live much like the city dwellers of the 1920s. You had your house in town and then, when Memorial Day arrived, you packed up your bags and decamped to your place at the beach, a mere 8 miles away. The owners of this house, Jackie and Cal Lewis, are members of that club: They spend most of the year at their residence in Forest Hills and much of the summer along Waynick Avenue in Wrightsville Beach.

The three-story wood-frame house faces Banks Channel; the owners also have an attractive dock across the street with Adirondack chairs and a lawn that runs down to the water. They had already done work on the third floor, which contains the bedrooms and bathrooms, and called on Wilmington designer Liz Carroll to help with a refresh on the second floor of the house, which consists of the public rooms — a floor-through that accommodates living and dining areas and a kitchen, a challenging task with many functions in such a finite amount of space. The second floor also features front and back porches for entertaining.

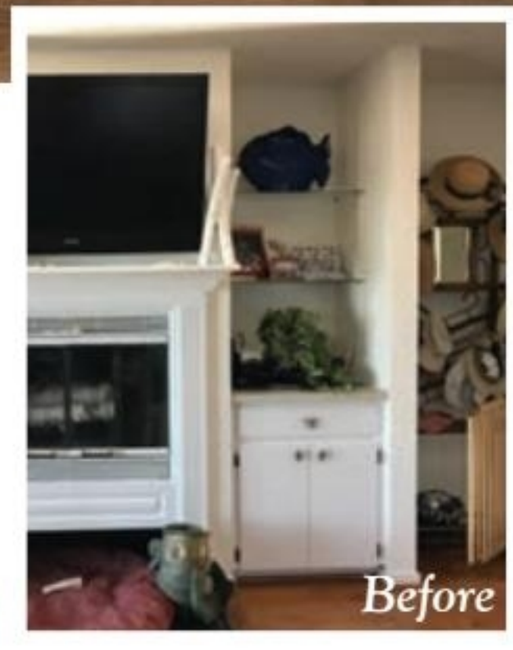
"Their house in town is really colorful, so they wanted something cool and neutral at the beach," says Carroll.

Carroll realized she would have to start from scratch, which meant taking everything out, beginning in the kitchen. "The centerpiece of the kitchen was an L-shaped island that kind of trapped you," says Carroll. "If you were cooking back there you had to walk all the way around it to get out." The space had a popcorn ceiling and fluorescent lights, and cabinetry that was badly in need of an update. Thankfully, her client was very simpatico.

"Jackie is a fantastic cook with three grown daughters, and she is known for her entertaining," says Carroll. "It was really great to work on the kitchen with her, because she had very specific ideas about what she needed and where she wanted it."

Carroll installed new custom cabinetry with many fitted draw-

Before



ers for spices and utensils. She installed a new waterfall island, which surrounds the built-in cabinets, and covered the surface with a lovely quartz, Cambria, with a gray stripe. "Jackie saw it and loved it. We also used the quartz for the backsplash behind the sink. The great thing about quartz is that it's a man-made engineered stone, so you can get the look of marble without all the upkeep and care."

Carroll streamlined the countertop seating with enough room for casual dining for four. The lighting was replaced by a modern update on 18th-century carriage lanterns, custom-colored from Urban Electric in Charleston.

The dining area was a different challenge. "Much of the furniture here was too large for the house," says Carroll. A large louvered sideboard occupied the entire wall of the dining area. Carroll removed this and replaced it with a built-in dry bar.

"The extra space meant that I could maximize the wall height for storage," she says. The room formerly had a free-standing table and chairs, which took up a lot of valuable real estate in the small space and blocked the rear views to the back porch. Carroll replaced the traditional dining chairs with a long banquette along the wall, which has become popular seating for grandkids and is covered in a washable fabric. The oval dining table has a clamshell stone pattern finish on a metal silver base, "which was a great way to have a formal look with some added texture," says Carroll. Further texture can be found in the Chinese Chippendale chairs, which are covered in a nubby indoor/outdoor fabric.

The first thing to go in the living room was the fireplace. "It was really wide and took up a lot of space," says Carroll. She recovered the walls with shiplap and converted the fireplace area into a built-in storage unit with room for a wide-screen TV flanked by shelves to display artwork. The living area was formerly dominated by two large shabby chic-style armchairs with ottomans flanking a navy sofa under the window. Carroll got out the swatches and started to reimagine a room with a cool palette and cleaner, more modern furniture.

First came floor-length curtains on the front windows in Llewellyn, a pattern from her line of wallpaper and fabrics, House of Harris. "I like this because it's a neutral organic stripe," says Carroll. "The owner has a great color sense, so we both had the same vision for this room." A trim sofa is covered in washable oatmeal-colored linen; a pair of round ottomans are covered with a textured fabric; and a pair of icy blue armchairs face the view of Banks Channel. The overall effect is a space that is cool, soothing, and serene.

And as you sink into a chair, watching the sailboats out the window, you don't want to be anywhere else.

William Irvine is the senior editor of Salt.

ALMANAC

July

By Ash Alder

Snapshots from July are salt-laced and dreamy.

Children skipping through sprinklers on the front lawn.

Baskets of ripe peaches, still warm from the sun.

Tree houses and tackle boxes.

Tangles of wild blackberry.

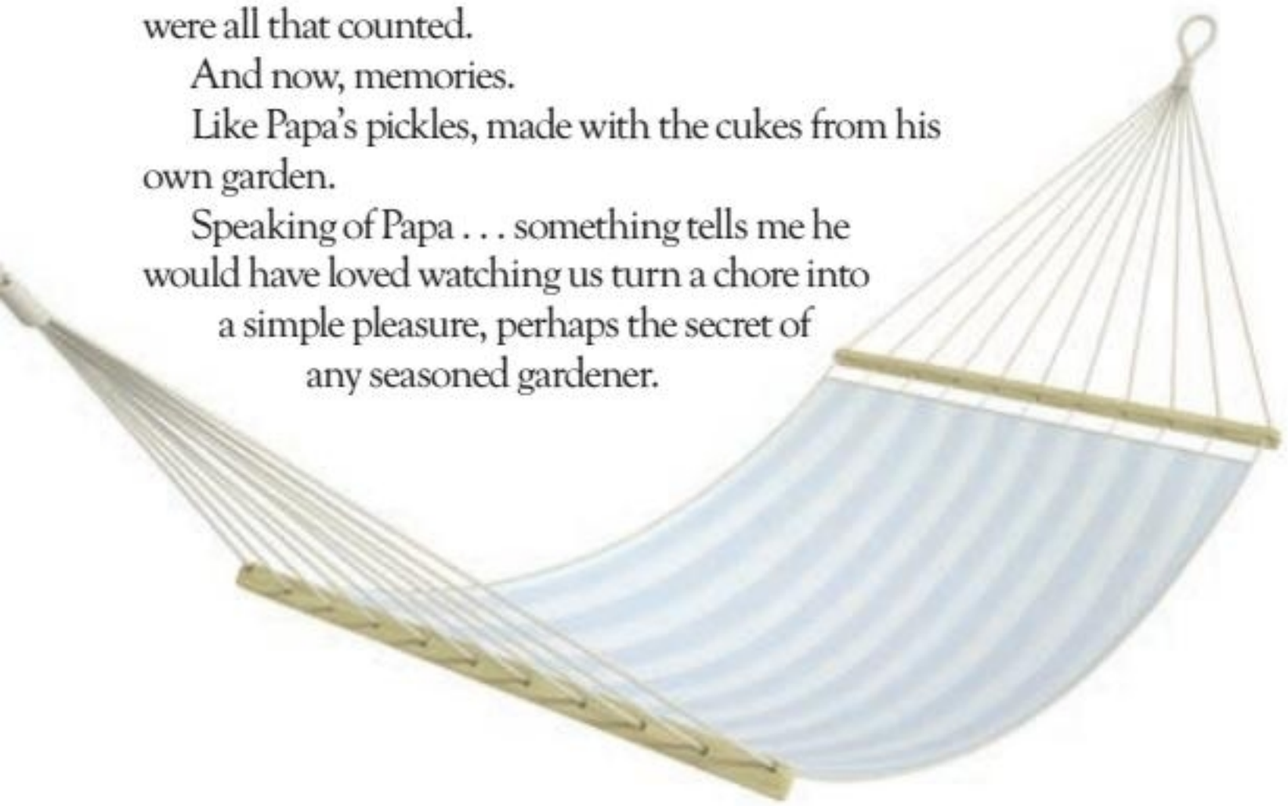
Brown paper bags filled with just-picked sweet corn.

Last summer, gathered in celebration of July 4, we made a game of shucking sweet corn on my grandmother's front porch. Two points for each clean ear, a bonus per earworm, yet as husks and corn silk began to carpet the ground beneath us, joy and laughter were all that counted.

And now, memories.

Like Papa's pickles, made with the cukes from his own garden.

Speaking of Papa . . . something tells me he would have loved watching us turn a chore into a simple pleasure, perhaps the secret of any seasoned gardener.



The Art of Shade-Dwelling

In the sticky July heat our state is known for, not just the flowers are wilting.

Advice from a fern: seek shade and thrive.

Yes, you.

Bring a hammock, summer reading, refreshments, pen and journal.

Daydream beneath the lush canopy. Bathe in the filtered light. Indulge in the summery soundscape. Cloud gaze.

And if you're looking for a spot by the water, follow the spiraling dragonfly. She will always lead you there.

Fresh from the Garden

Eggplant, snap beans, green beans, summer squash. Plump tomatoes are spilling from the vine, but there are two words on my mind: melon season.

In one word: cantaloupe.

And while it's fresh and abundant, consider some new ways to enjoy it.

Blend it with club soda and honey.

Salt and spice it with crushed peppercorn and sumac.

Toss it with arugula, fennel and oregano.

Make cool melon soup, or sweet-and-salty jam.

Nothing spells refreshing like chilled cubes of it after a hot day in the sun, but if you're looking for savory, check out the below recipe from Epicurious.

Cantaloupe and Cucumber Salad

(Makes 4 servings)

Ingredients

1/2 cup olive oil

1/4 cup Champagne vinegar or white wine vinegar

1 teaspoon ground coriander

1 teaspoon kosher salt

1/4 teaspoon freshly ground black pepper

1/8 teaspoon ground cardamom

1/2 large cantaloupe, rind and seeds removed, flesh cut into 1-inch pieces

1 large English hothouse cucumber, sliced on a diagonal -inch thick

2 Fresno chiles, thinly sliced

1/2 cup unsalted, roasted pumpkin seeds (pepitas)

1/4 cup chopped cilantro

1/4 cup chopped mint

Sumac (for serving)

Ingredient Info

Sumac is a tart, citrusy spice generally sold in ground form. It can be found at Middle Eastern markets, specialty foods stores and online.

Preparation

Whisk oil, vinegar, coriander, salt, pepper and cardamom in a large bowl. Add cantaloupe, cucumber and chiles, and toss to coat in dressing. Let sit, uncovered, 15 minutes.

To serve, add pumpkin seeds, cilantro and mint to salad and toss gently to combine. Top with sumac.

Lazy Days of Summer

The full buck moon rises on Tuesday, July 16, which, according to *The Old Farmer's Almanac*, is a good day for pruning, mowing and weeding. But if R&R is more your speed, below are a few obscure holidays you might add to the calendar.

July 10: Pick Blueberries Day

July 17: Peach Ice Cream Day

July 20: Ice Cream Soda Day

July 22: Hammock Day

Happy Independence Day, friends. Happy, happy hot July.

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Arts Calendar

North Carolina Symphony Stars and Stripes Concert

7/2

Five Guys Named Moe

7/4-7

Carolina Beach Double Sprint Triathlon

7/13

To add a calendar event, please contact calendar@saltmagazinenc.com. Events must be submitted by the first of the month, one month prior to the event.

7/1-4

North Carolina 4th of July Festival

Come down to Southport for the North Carolina Fourth of July Festival, a weekend-long celebration with a wide range of activities — everything from a parade, fireworks and classic car show to a naturalization and flag-raising ceremony. Admission: Free. Southport Waterfront, Yacht Basin Drive, Southport. For info: (910) 457-6964 or nc4thofjuly.com.

7/2

North Carolina Symphony Stars and Stripes Concert

7:30 p.m. The North Carolina Symphony's annual celebration of Independence Day features a variety of patriotic music. Admission: $20-$45. Wilson Center, 703 N. Third St., Wilmington. Info: (910) 362-7999 or cfcc.edu.

7/3

Independence Day Boardwalk Blast

6:30 p.m.- 9 p.m. Carolina Beach's annual celebration features live music with the Polar Bear Blues Band and fireworks over the water. Admission: Free. Carolina Beach Boardwalk, Cape Fear Blvd., Carolina Beach. For info: (910) 458-8434.

Night Hike

6 p.m. and 7 p.m. Walk the park after dark and learn about bats, owls, and other nighttime residents. Ages 5 and up. Admission: $5. Halyburton Park, 4099 S. 17th St., Wilmington. Info: halyburtonpark.com. For info: (910) 341-0075 or halyburtonpark.com.

7/4

Fourth of July Celebration

6 p.m. - 9:30 p.m. The Full Spectrum Rock Band from Langley Air Force Base in Virginia headlines this evening's entertainment, with a fireworks display at 9:05 p.m. Admission: Free. Riverfront Park, Water Street at Princess, Wilmington. For info: (910) 341-7855 or wilmingtondowntown.com.

Battle for Independence 5K and 1- Mile Run

7:30 a.m. The 5K and 1-mile run go along Independence Blvd. and the Cross City Trail. Proceeds benefit Step Up for Soldiers and Team RWB. Admission: $20-$30. The Pointe at Barclay, Barclay Pointe Blvd., Wilmington. For info: its-go-time.com/battle-for-independence.

7/4-7

Five Guys Named Moe

7:30 p.m. Opera House Theatre Company's production of *Five Guys Named Moe*, featuring the classic music of Louis Jordan, the King of the Jukebox. Admission: $20. Thalian Hall, 310 Chestnut St., Wilmington. Info: (910) 632-2285 or thalianhall.org.

7/5

Airlie Gardens Summer Concert Series

6 - 8 p.m. Tonight's concert features the Wilmington Big Band under the famous Airlie Oak. Admission: $3-$10. Airlie Gardens 300 Airlie Road, Wilmington. Info: (910) 798-7700 or airliegardens.org.

7/6-7

45th Annual Cape Fear 7s Rugby Tournament

8 a.m - 4 p.m. The 45th Annual Cape Fear 7s Rugby Tournament features men's and women's teams

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from across the country. Admission: Free. Cape Fear Soccer Park, 205 Sutton Steam Plant Road, Wilmington. For info: fear7s.com.

Carnivorous Plant Hike

10 a.m. Park rangers at Carolina Beach State Park will introduce the group to pitcher plants, bladderworts, and Venus flytraps. Admission: Free. Carolina Beach State Park, 1010 State Park Road, Carolina Beach. For info: (910) 458-8206 or carla.edwards@ncparks.gov.

7/8

Great American Poetry Crawl

7 p.m. Come join poet Brendan Walsh and local authors Melissa Crowe and Khalisa Rae for a literary evening with performance. Admission: Free. Old Books on Front Street, 249 N. Front St., Wilmington. For info: brendanwalshpoetry@gmail.com.

7/10

Story Time By the Sea

10 a.m. - 11:30 a.m. Fairytales and Dreams by the Sea presents Story Time by the Sea. Costumed princesses lead a morning of stories and games. Admission: Free. Ocean Front Park, 105 Atlantic Ave., Kure Beach. For info: (910) 458-8216 or townofkurebeach.org.

7/11-12

Wilmington Sharks Baseball

7:05 p.m. Thursday: Morehead City Marlins. Friday: Fayetteville Swamp Dogs in the Coastal Plain League games. Admission: $7-$11. Buck Hardee Field-Legion Sports Complex, 2149 Carolina Beach Road, Wilmington. For info: wilmingtonsharks.com.

7/12

Opening Night Poetry Jam

7:30 p.m. The Lumina Festival of the Arts kicks off tonight with the Opening Night Poetry Jam, hosted by Bigg B and Sandra of Coast 97.3. Kenan Auditorium, UNCW, 515 Wagoner Drive, Wilmington. For info: (910) 962-3500.

Rhythm of the River

7:30 p.m. A benefit concert for New Hanover County Schools music programs, Rhythm of the River features musical acts Striking Copper, Jake Newman and Travis Shallow. Admission: $17-$20. Brooklyn Arts Center, 516 N. Fourth St., Wilmington. Info: brooklynartsnc.com.

7/13

Opera Wilmington Behind the Scenes

10 a.m. - 12 p.m. The Lumina Festival of the Arts presents Opera Wilmington Behind the Scenes, an open house with tours of the vocal studio, scene and costume shops and a preview of the company's next production. Admission: Free. UNCW Cultural Arts Building, 5270 Randall Drive, Wilmington. For info: operawilmington.org.

Footprints

7:30 p.m. The Lumina Festival of the Arts presents *Footprints*, a series of three modern dance classics: Martha Graham's *Dark Meadow Suite*, Merce Cunningham's *How to Pass Kick, Fall and Run*, and Paul Taylor's *Esplanade*. Admission: $20-$50. Kenan Auditorium, 515 Wagoner Drive, Wilmington. For info: (910) 962-3500.

7/12-13

Adventure Sail

6 p.m. Come learn some sailing basics on board a J/22 sailboat. BYOB wine and beer. Soft drinks provided. Admission: $75. Blockade Runner Beach Resort, 275 Waynick Blvd., Wilmington. For info: blockade-runner.com/event/adventure-sail-6.

7/13

Carolina Beach Double Sprint Triathlon

8 a.m. This triathlon begins with a 375-meter ocean swim, followed by a 1.5-mile run, 20-mile bike ride, another 1.5-mile run, and a final swim of 375 meters. Admission: $75-$85. Carolina Beach (Hamlet Avenue Beach Access), Hamlet Avenue, Carolina Beach. For info: setupevents.com/nc-tri or (910) 620-6405.

7/14

Latin Dance Salsa Party

9 p.m. The Lumina Festival of the Arts and Wilmington Latin Dance present a Latin Dance Salsa Party, including a beginner's lesson, performances by Wilmington Latin Dance, and a large dance party for all comers. Admission: Free. UNCW, 601 S. College Road, Wilmington. For info: (910) 962-3500 or wilmingtonlatindance.com.

7/17

UNCW Summer Jazz Workshop Faculty Big Band

7:30 p.m. As part of the Lumina Festival of the Arts, the band performs with Grammy award-winning jazz trumpeter Michael Mossman. Kenan Auditorium, 515 Wagoner Drive, Wilmington. For info: (910) 962-3500.

7/17-21

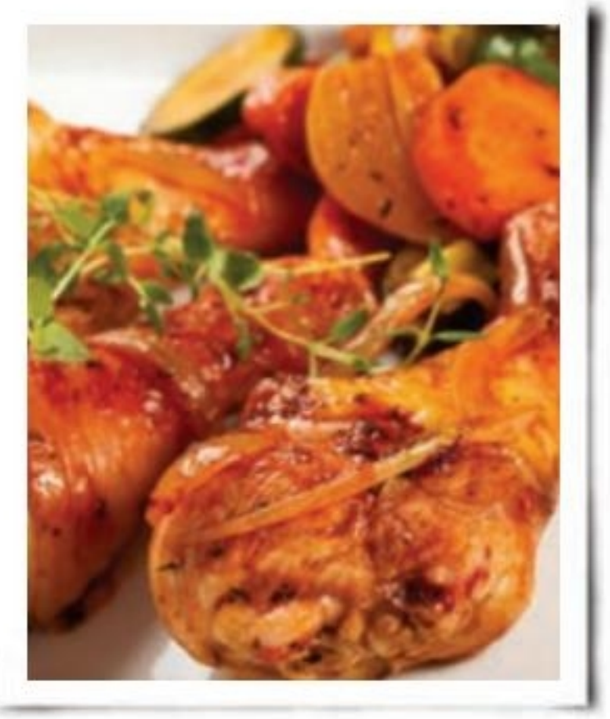
Circle Mirror Transformation

8 p.m.; 3 p.m. Sunday. Big Dawg Productions presents the Obie Award-winning play *Circle Mirror Transformation* by Annie Baker. Admission: $18-$25. Cape Fear Playhouse, 613 Castle St., Wilmington. For info: (910) 367-5237 or bigdawgproductions.org.

7/18

Greensky Bluegrass in Concert

6 p.m. The Penguin presents the Kalamazoo, Michigan-based Greensky Bluegrass in concert. Admission: $30-$35. Kids under 11 are free. Greenfield Lake Amphitheater, 1941



Food Truck Roundup

7/20

Amphitheater Drive, Wilmington. For info: greenfieldlakeamphitheater.com.

An Evening of Classic Lily Tomlin

7:30 p.m. The acclaimed comedian and Mark Twain Prize winner comes to Wilmington for one night only. Admission: $40-$90. Wilson Center, 703 N. Third St., Wilmington. Info: (910) 362-7999 or cfcc.edu.

Seahawk Family Arts Matinee

10:30 a.m. A production of Make Trouble Theatre's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* by William Shakespeare. Admission: $5. Kenan Auditorium, UNCW, 515 Wagoner Drive, Wilmington. For info: (910) 962-3500 or uncw.edu/arts/series/fam.html.

7/19

La Boheme by Opera Wilmington

7 p.m. The Lumina Festival of the Arts presents the Opera Wilmington production of Puccini's opera *La Boheme*. Admission: $25-$60. UNCW Cultural Arts Building, 5270 Randall Drive, Wilmington. For info: (910) 962-3500 or operawilmington.org.

7/20

Historical Walking Tour

10 a.m.-12 p.m. Cemetery superintendent Erik Kozen leads a tour of Oakdale, North Carolina's oldest rural cemetery. Admission: $10. Oakdale Cemetery, 520 N. 15th St., Wilmington. For info: (910) 762-5682 or oakdalecemetery.org.

Food Truck Roundup

3 p.m. - 8 p.m. More than 16 trucks offering foods of many countries will be accompanied by the Folkstone String Band at this benefit for Poplar Grove Plantation. Wine/beer and cocktails available. Admission: Free. Donations suggested. Poplar Grove Plantation, 10200 US Highway 17 North, Wilmington. For info: (910) 686-9518 or poplargrove.org.

7/26-28

Frozen Jr. The Musical

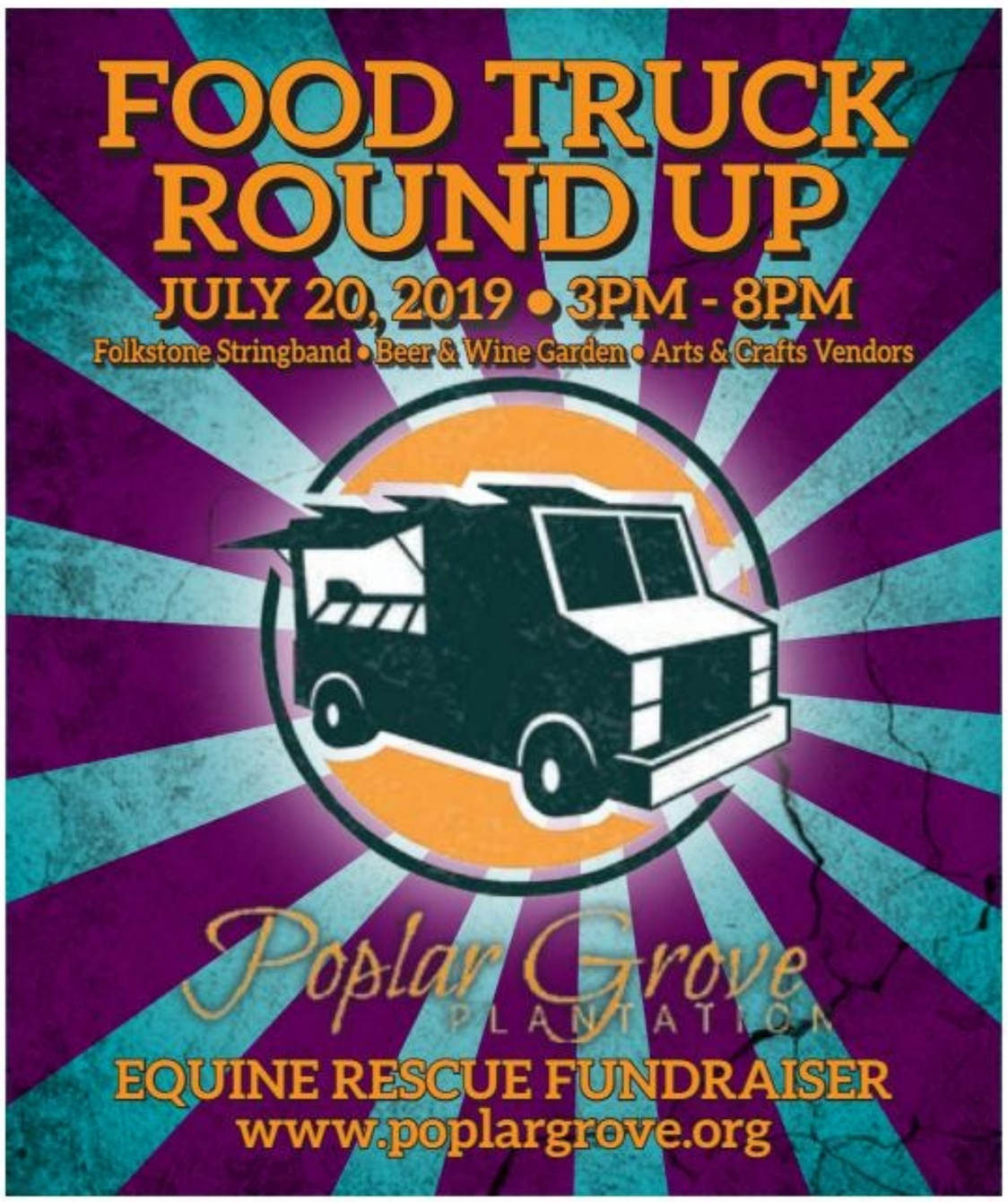
Friday, 6 p.m.; Saturday, 3 and 6 p.m.; Sunday, 3 p.m. The Performance Club Studio Theater presents *Frozen Jr: The Musical*, a youth performance based on the 2018 Broadway production. Admission: $15. Ruth and Bucky Stein Theatre, Thalian Hall 310 Chestnut St., Wilmington. Info: (910) 632-2285 or thalianhall.org.

WEEKLY HAPPENINGS

Monday

Wrightsville Farmers Market

8 a.m. – 1 p.m. Curbside beach market offering a va-



riety of fresh, locally grown produce, baked goods, plants and unique arts and crafts. Seawater Lane, Wrightsville Beach. Info: (910) 256-7925 or www.townofwrightsvillebeach.com.

Tuesday

Wine Tasting

6 p.m. – 8 p.m. Free wine tasting hosted by a wine professional plus small plate specials all night. Admission: Free. The Fortunate Glass, 29 S. Front St., Wilmington. Info: (910) 399-4292 or www.fortunateglass.com.

Cape Fear Blues Jam

8 p.m. A night of live music performed by the area's best blues musicians. Bring your instrument and join in the fun. Admission: Free. The Rusty Nail, 1310 S. Fifth Ave., Wilmington. Info: (910) 251-1888 or www.capefearblues.org.

Wednesday

Free Wine Tasting at Sweet n Savory Cafe

5 p.m. – 8 p.m. Sample delicious wines for free. Pair them with a meal, dessert, or appetizer and learn more about the wines of the world. Live music starts at 7. Admission: Free. Sweet n Savory Cafe, 1611 Pavilion Place, Wilmington. Info: (910) 256-0115 or www.swetnsavorycafe.com.

Weekly Exhibition Tours

1:30 p.m. – 2:00 p.m. A weekly tour of the iconic Cameron Arts Museum, featuring presentations about the various exhibits and the selection and installation process. Cameron Arts Museum, 3201 S. 17th St., Wilmington. Info: (910) 395-5999 or www.cameronartsmuseum.org.

Ogden Farmers Market

8 a.m. – 1 p.m. Local farmers, producers and artisans sell fresh fruits, veggies, plants, eggs, cheese, meat, honey, baked goods, wine, bath products and more. Ogden Park, 615 Ogden Park Drive, Wilmington. Info: (910) 538-6223 or www.wilmingtonandbeaches.com/events-calendar/ogden-farmers-market.

Poplar Grove Farmers Market

8 a.m. – 1 p.m. Open-air market held on the front lawn of historic Poplar Grove Plantation offering fresh produce, plants, herbs, baked goods and handmade artisan crafts. Poplar Grove Plantation, 10200 US Highway 17 N., Wilmington. Info: (910) 395-5999 or www.poplargrove.org/farmers-market.

Thursday

Wrightsville Beach Brewery Farmers Market

2 p.m. – 6 p.m. Come support local farmers and artisans every Thursday afternoon in the beer garden at the Wrightsville Beach Brewery. Shop for eggs, veggies, meat, honey, and handmade crafts while enjoying one of the Brewery's tasty beers. Stay for live music afterwards. Admission: Free. Wrightsville Beach Brewery, 6201 Oleander Dr., Wilmington. Info: (910) 256-4938 or www.wbbeer.com.

Yoga at the CAM

12–1 p.m. Join in a soothing retreat sure to charge you up while you relax in a beautiful, comfortable setting. Sessions are ongoing and are open to both beginners and experienced participants. Admission: $5–8. Cameron Art Museum, 3201 S. 17th St., Wilmington. Info: (910) 395-5999 or www.cameronartmuseum.org.

Friday and Saturday

Cape Fear Museum Little Explorers

10 a.m. Meet your friends in Museum Park for fun, hands-on activities! Enjoy interactive circle time, conduct exciting experiments, and play games related to a weekly theme. Perfect for children ages 3 to 6 and their adult helpers. Admission: Free. Cape Fear Museum, 814 Market St., Wilmington. Info: (910) 798-4370 or www.capefearmuseum.com.

Blackwater Adventure Tours

Join in an educational guided boat tour from downtown Wilmington to River Bluffs, exploring the mysterious beauty of the Northeast Cape Fear River. See website for schedule. River Bluffs, 1100 Chair Road, Castle Hayne. Info: (910) 623-5015 or www.riverbluffsliving.com.

Saturday

Carolina Beach Farmers Market

8 a.m. – 1 p.m. Outdoor "island-style" market featuring live music and local growers, producers and artisans selling fresh local produce, wines, meats, baked goods, herbal products and handmade crafts. Carolina Beach Lake Park, Highway 421 and Atlanta Avenue, Carolina Beach. Info: (910) 458-2977 or www.carolinabeachfarmersmarket.com.

Wilmington Farmers Market at Tidal Creek

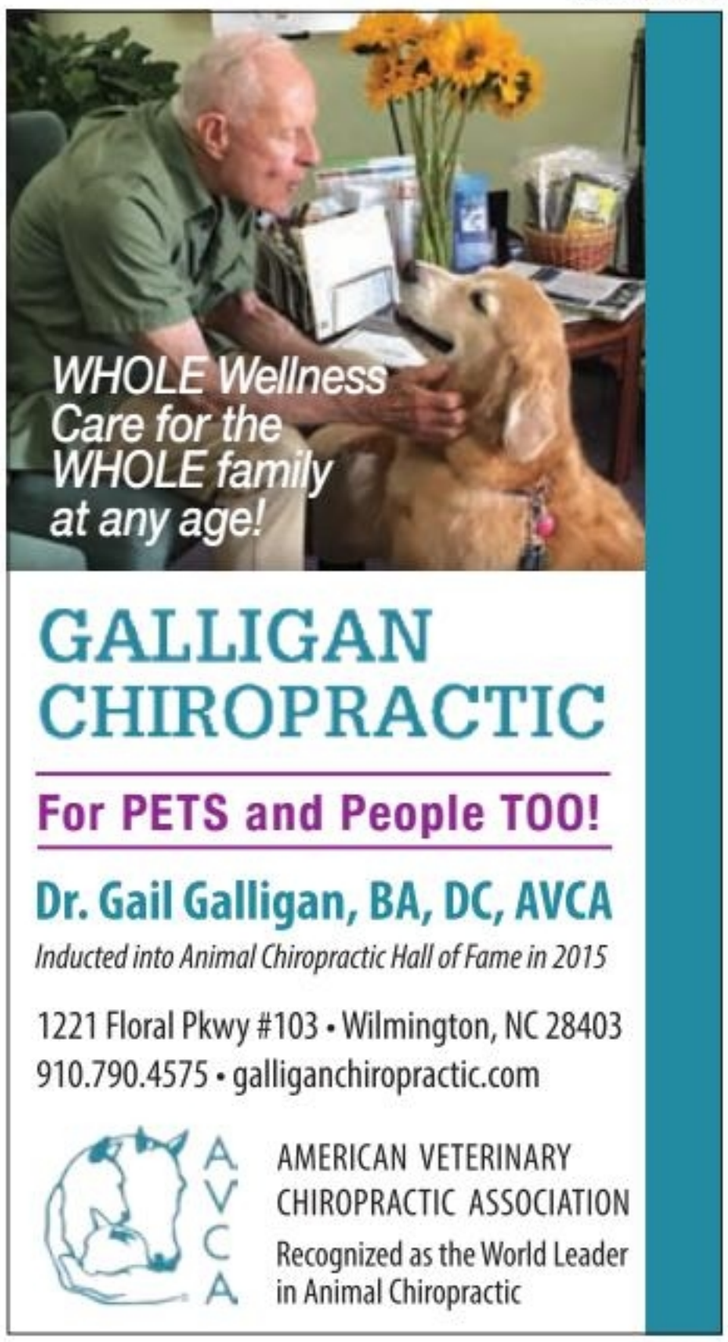
8 a.m. to 1 p.m. Weekly gathering of vetted vendors with fresh produce straight from the farm. Sign up for the weekly newsletter for advanced news of the coming weekend's harvest. 5329 Oleander Drive, Wilmington. For info: thewilmingtonfarmersmarket.com.

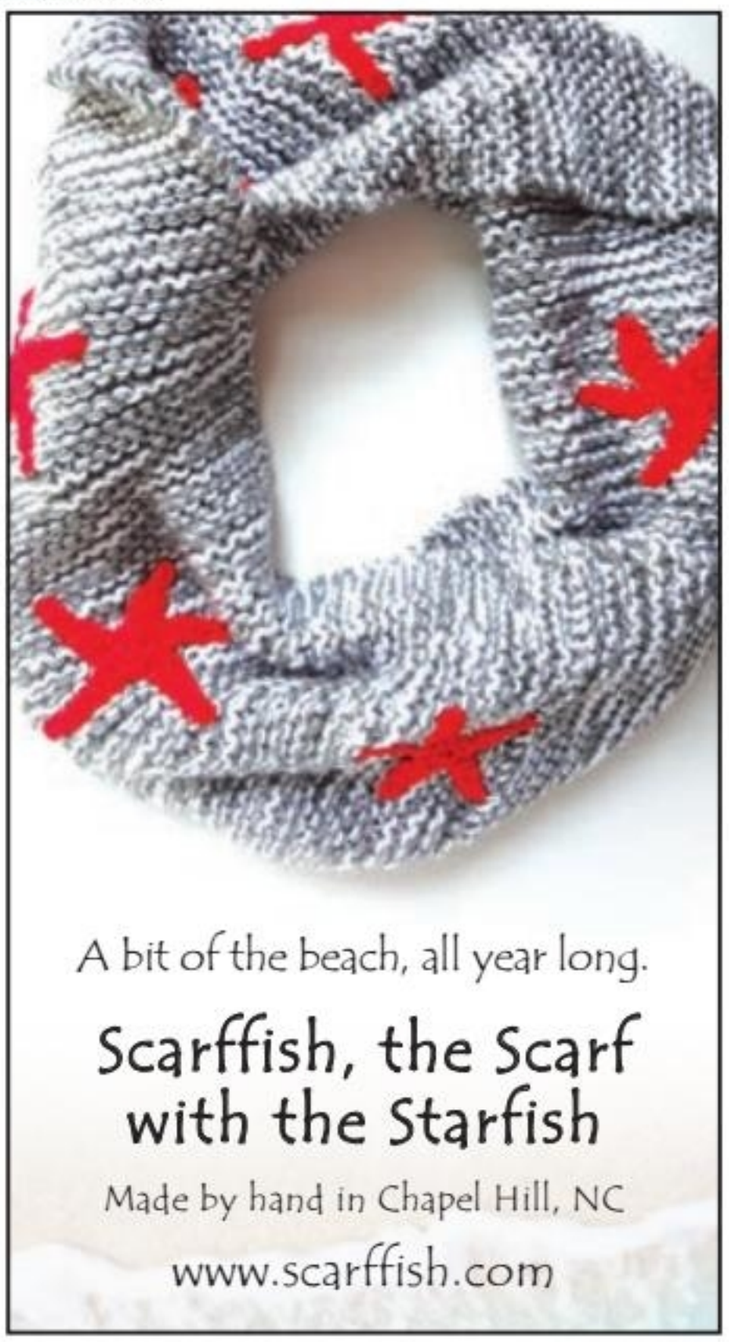
Riverfront Farmers Market

8 a.m. – 1 p.m. Curbside market featuring local farmers, producers, artisans, crafters and live music along the banks of the Cape Fear River. Riverfront Park, North Water St., Wilmington. Info: (910) 538-6223 or www.wilmingtondowntown.com/events/farmers-market.

Taste of Downtown Wilmington

2:15 p.m., 2:45 p.m., and 3:15 p.m. A weekly gourmet food tour by Taste Carolina, featuring some of downtown Wilmington's best restaurants. Each time slot showcases different food. See website for details. Admission: $55–75. Riverwalk at Market Street, Wilmington. Info: (919) 237-2254 or www.tastecarolina.net/wilmington/.





Port City People

Design NC Cocktail Party
at the Cameron Art Museum

Thursday, May 16, 2019

Photographs by Bill Ritenour

Louise Mann, Shahrzad Gardner, Jayme Bednarczyk

Tim McAlphin, Savannah Amerson

Blair Hogan, Thomas & Laura Covington, Tom Verellen

John Jordan, Alexa Hampton

Emily Bell, Laurie Claire Davidson, Meredith West

Judy & R.V. Fulk

Rachel Murray, Ray Kennedy

Kim Shipley, Louise Mann, Sarah Morris

Elizabeth & Vin Wells

Chip Callaway, Jean Keller, Robert Hickman, Jennifer Kraner

Jayme Bednarczyk, Rebecca Laymon, Lisa Merriam

Elizabeth Wright, Lillian Teer, Jenny Purvis

Port City People

Design NC Forum and Luncheon

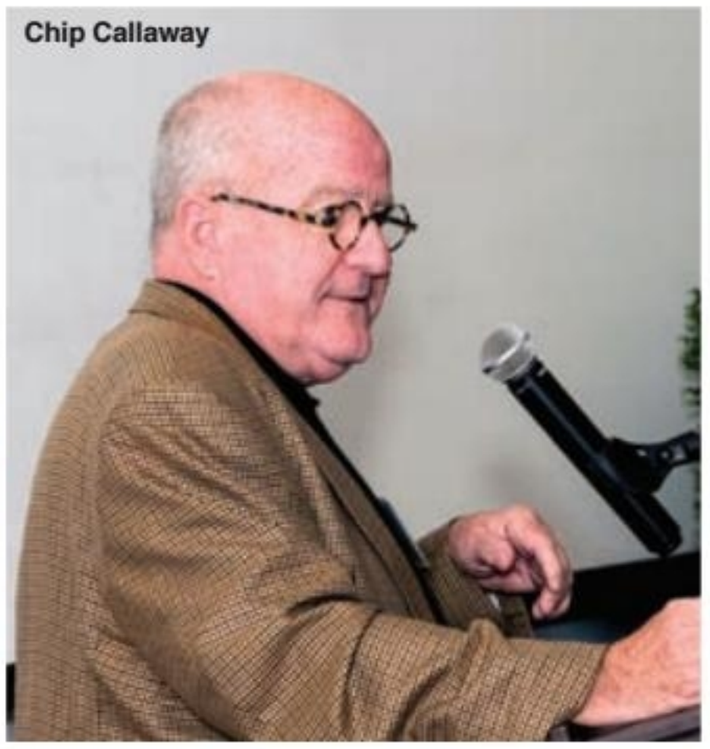
at the Cameron Art Museum

Friday, May 17, 2019

Photographs by Bill Ritenour

Anne Brennan

Louise Mann serving wine at luncheon


Chip Callaway

Jayme Bednarczyk offering a toast

Jeff Davis, Alexa Hampton

Amanda Black

Marshall Watson

Mary Martin, Chip Callaway, Alexa Hampton

Alexa Hampton, Marshall Watson

John Jordan

Alexa Hampton

Port City People

4th Annual Lip Sync for a Cure

Hosted by Ariana Jo, Realtor at Ironclad Brewery

Friday, May 10, 2019

Photographs by Bill Ritenour

Abby & Lily Gilb

Hanna Patrick, Hope Benton, Jeff Rivenbark, Kelsie Anderson

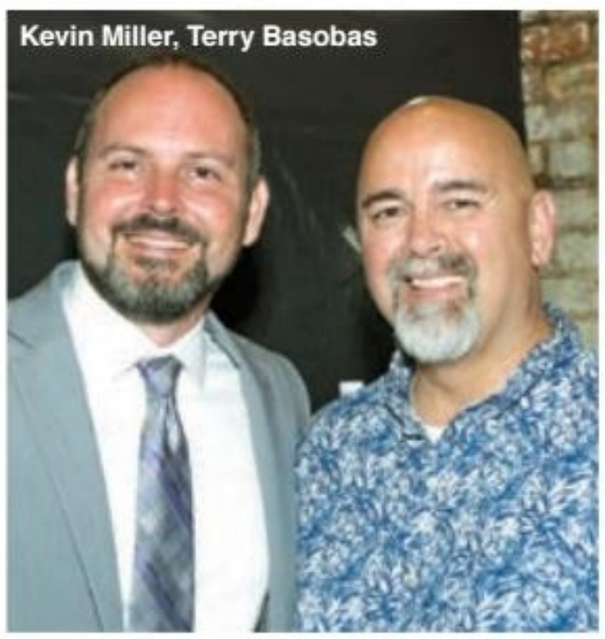
Caley Sebrell, Gina Gilb

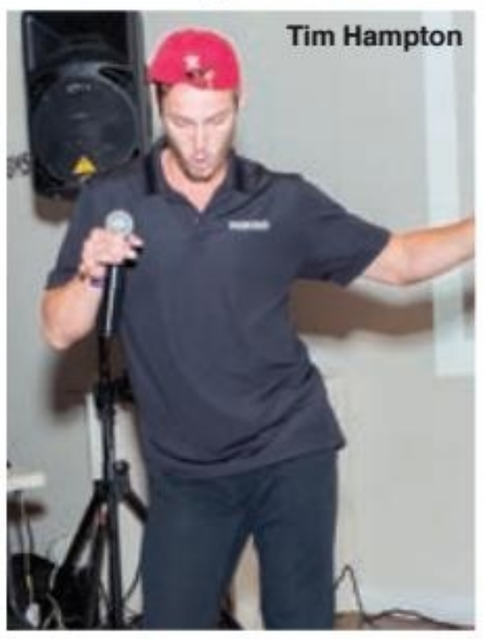
Dave Dorosko

Ariana Jo, Sean Ruttkay, Terry Lane

Caitlin Hunter
(Grand Prize Winner)

Michael Stroud, Sia Mayorga


Kevin Miller, Terry Basobas


Tim Hampton

Terry Lane

Allison Tamney, Drew Kakouras

Justice Bailey, Tim Hampton, Kelsey Frantz, Ben Buhlar

Hope Benton,
Kelsie Anderson

Port City People

Blockade Runner Garden Party
Grand Re-Opening

Thursday, May 30, 2019

Photographs by Bill Ritenour

Mary Baggett Martin (CEO Blockade Runner), Cal Cunningham

Nicholas Montoya (Gen. Mgr. Blockade Runner)

David Woronoff (Publisher of *Salt* magazine)

Fern Bugg, Robert Hickman

DJ & Lorelai Struntz

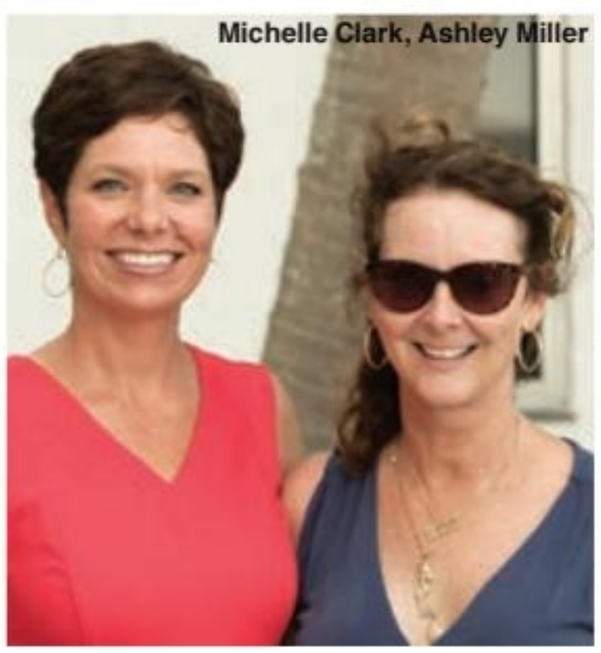
Gene & Liz Haley, Gary & Mary Allison

"Sea Pans" - band

Phyllis Gates, Patti Holt, Bobbie Edwards, Donna Millis

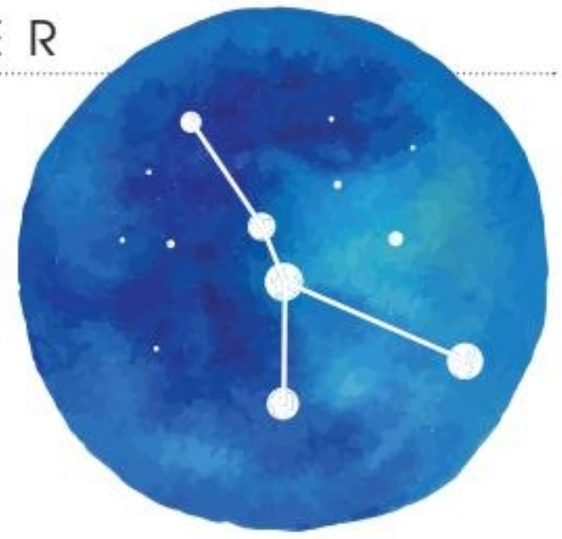
Bill Baggett (Co-owner of Blockade Runner Resort)

Dr. Curry Guinn, Virginia Holman


Michelle Clark, Ashley Miller

Jane Birnbac, Linda Ritenour

Dr. Jon Amdur, Dr. Cathy Anne Amdur, Susan Nelson



Grins and Giggles

Cancerians bring light and light-heartedness to the darkness

By Astrid Stellanova

A whole lot of July Star Children are born with a funny streak, and live for shenanigans. One is that high-larious actor Ken Jeong, the doctor and comedian who just so happens to be a Page High School alum. Recently he revisited his local roots to deliver the commencement at UNCG — and delivered the grads from taking themselves too seriously.

The fun and fabulous Sofia Vergara, Will Farrell and comic genius Robin Williams were born under the sign of Cancer. How ironic that the sign of the crab should produce so many big wits and comedians. Like the stars, they light the darkness.

Cancer (June 21–July 22)
That double-dang double-crosser who broke your trust will get theirs, and you won't have to lift a pinky. Not to worry one second. Let's put it this way: If you were a comic book hero, you'd be known for your super power of . . . judgey-ness. You have super powers you have never even explored. Like an incredible talent for sussing up a situation and knowing when to hightail it outta Dodge.

Leo (July 23–August 22)
While you were busy monkey-branching like you were Tarzan, you forgot to look down. If you had, you would have noticed some circling hyenas waiting for you to slip and fall. Those are some of the pack you used to run with, and now, Sugar, you need to outrun them. Put your past waay behind you.

Virgo (August 23–September 22)
This is classic you: not exactly inclined to give a rat's you-know-what or a gnat's little patootie for status or approval. And Honey, you get a lotta lovin' for that! Next up: letting down the old guard and making yourself vulnerable. Trust ain't just a banking term.

Libra (September 23–October 22)
You didn't just lose touch with reality. Sugar, you broke the whole handle off things trying to get a grip. A new work opportunity is golden, but your domestic situation is suffering. Take care of those who tend to the hearth and home.

Scorpio (October 23–November 21)
The tee-nine-sy part of you that likes approval took over your whole world. If you want to win friends, Darling, let's put your "I Know It All" merit badge away in a drawer. Sure you earned it. But it has not helped your sex life or friendships one bit.

Sagittarius (November 22–December 21)
The juice just ain't worth the squeeze, Sugar. You have worked hard to make good on a promise to yourself and another. Now you have a significant situation that has escaped you and is calling your name. Time to squeeze and release.

Capricorn (December 22–January 19)
By the time you can say tickety-boo you let the cat out of the bag. Not your fault; a trickster you know so well made you spill. No worries. There is time to clean up the mess on Aisle Five before anybody's the wiser.

Aquarius (January 20–February 18)
Rinse and repeat. Words to live by. Works real good for stains and also works good for self-love and redemption. Forgive yourself, Darling, for letting a situation get a little gray and a whole lot dingy. It will all come out in the wash.

Pisces (February 19–March 20)
Fireworks don't have a place in your life except for Independence Day. Dial back emotions, and just recognize somebody set a tripwire for you because they are more volatile than a pig in a hailstorm. They only wish they had your self-control.

Aries (March 21–April 19)
Looks like you stuck the baster in the wrong end of the chicken, Honey. You have been in such a dizzy place that you forgot your purpose and dang near lost your marbles. Recalibrate. Breathe. Meditate. Honey Bun, just do anything but knit your brows.

Taurus (April 20–May 20)
Pigs were flying when you (praise Jesus) decided to zip it and keep the peace just when your nemesis made a total jerk out of himself. Take a bow. You have just zoomed to the front of the astral line for having passed a major spiritual challenge.

Gemini (May 21-June 20)
Sometimes you open your mouth and your Mamma falls out. Life has been a little too boring for your tastes, so you decided to pull the plug on a very good idea and watch it all go right down the dang drain. It will not be boring to reconnoiter.

For years, Astrid Stellanova owned and operated Curl Up and Dye Beauty Salon in the boondocks of North Carolina until arthritic fingers and her popular astrological readings provoked a new career path.

Reminders

A kind of grief

By Susan S. Kelly

This is the month that I turn 65. I suspect I'll have a breakdown.

I don't put much store by birthdays typically. As a child, a July birthday meant that my friends were away on family vacations, so no one was around for a party. A summer birthday meant no cupcakes in elementary school, or care packages from Hickory Farms — the standard-but-thrilling gift — at boarding school. As an adult, I seem often to be at the beach, where my mother annually suggests that we have a "nice piece of fish" to celebrate my birthday — a roll-eye refrain the entire family now uses whenever we're referring to celebrations of any kind.

My sister has a breakdown every time we leave the beach, crying and honking the car horn until she's out of sight. She's worried that by the next time we're all together again, someone will have died, divorced or been irreparably altered in some way. Cheerful, no? I made her a Breakdown CD full of mournful songs from James Taylor, Pachelbel's Canon, the themes from *To Kill A Mockingbird* and *The Thorn Birds*, so she'll have background music to wail with during the four-hour drive home.

The last time I had a breakdown birthday was 3 1/2 decades ago, when I turned 30. I was waiting at a stoplight and was suddenly just . . . overcome. I bowed my heard and laid my forehead against the hard, ridged, steering wheel and wept. I did not want to be 30 with children and a mortgage and a yard. I wanted to be a sorority girl wearing Topsiders and drinking beer at The Shack with my hair pulled back in a grosgrain ribbon on a Thursday afternoon. There was nothing for my despair but for my husband to take me to Chapel Hill for the weekend. But The Shack was a parking lot. Beers at the gleaming wood bar in Spanky's didn't cut it.

The good part about A Big Birthday year means that my friends are turning 65 too. Bridge buddies, hiking homies, college pals, boarding school classmates — all of us. Meaning that every day brings a veritable blizzard of emails filled with dates, pleas, opinions, rebuttals, suggestions, complaints, reminders, asides, and the occasional joke, all in the service of organizing what I term Girl Gigs. Girl Gigs deserve a column of their own, but I'll give you a teaser: One friend, for a Girl Gig in the mountains every January, flies in from Greenwich, Connecticut, and brings nothing but a mink coat and 3 pairs of pajamas. Stay tuned.

I don't care a whit about getting old, or dying (proved by my Funeral File, a topic addressed earlier in these pages). I'll admit to a fear of my house smelling like old people, and wondering whether it's time to go ahead and lock into what one friend calls a "terminal hairdo," the one you wear to the grave. And I drive a Mini Cooper, which seems to be the universally acknowledged car for females of a certain age. But otherwise, nope. No fear, no dread, no anxiety.

I also have zero regrets about those things in the past that I've done or left undone, or shoulda, woulda, coulda. Furthering my career? More me time? Taken that trip, accepted that offer? No, no, and no. Do-overs don't interest me.

Wherefore the melancholy, then? Just this: 1,277 photographs — give or take a couple dozen travel pictures — on a digital frame. A New Year's resolution labor of love with a scanner that rotates continuously all day, every day, showing me 1,277 times *what I cannot have back*. That summer twilight evening of my oldest in his tacky polyester pajamas blowing dime-store bubbles in the driveway before bedtime. That child wearing a mask while he watches television, oblivious that he's even wearing a mask. That child blowing out candles on what is surely the most hideous homemade birthday cake ever, shaped and iced like a sharpened pencil. The grin the day the braces came off. A husband mowing the lawn with a toddler draped around his neck like a pashmina.

What was I *doing* during these ordinary, everyday moments? What was I saying, thinking, hoping, cooking, even? I don't want to time travel, to swallow a magic youth pill, to go back and re-live. What stops and saddens me is the simple yet incontrovertible fact that, no matter what, I cannot get that Tuesday morning in that picture, where the child with the trike, or the new backpack for the first day of school, or that Sunday afternoon when a young husband tosses free throws at the driveway basketball goal — long since vanished — back. Not a single, commonplace, inconsequential second of them. Nothing I can do will return them to me. No begging. No money. No who-you-know. No good deeds. No nothing.

Thornton Wilder knew the kind of grief I'm talking about, and in his play, *Our Town*, has Emily Webb, who's dead, ask the Stage Manager, "Does anyone ever realize life while they live it . . . every, every minute?"

"No," the Stage Manager replies. "Saints and poets maybe . . . they do some."

And I'm neither.

So, this July, if you see someone pulled over with her head against the steering wheel, it's just me, in my Mini, in the breakdown lane.

Susan S. Kelly is a blithe spirit, author of several novels, and a proud grandmother.

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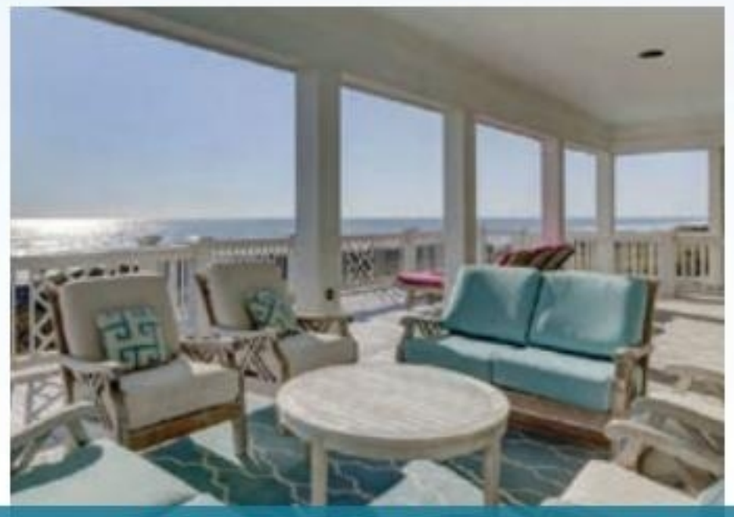

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